

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 70: Food Glorious Food. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Ottavia. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we talked about how manu, birds, were caught and then cooked as well as a bit about how food was preserved by Māori, including smoking, drying and fermenting. This time it's mostly just gonna be an eclectic mix of how various things were cooked and then eaten.

So, grilling was a pretty popular way to cook fish. In the case of maomao this would involve lighting a fire on a gravel beach and once the gravel was hot enough, the wood and embers would be swept away and the fish laid over the gravel on sticks. Maomao were also said to be so fat that they would cook in their fatty juices. That could be taken to an extreme though, according to Hiroa, grayling were sometimes too fat to the point where it would make you sick. He calls them he ika kino, a dangerous fish, for this reason, but otherwise he says they are pretty good eating and "possess none of the muddy flavour usually associated with fresh water fish." Fish and shellfish were often added to meals to add a bit of saltiness, whereas things like raupo pollen or water from the base of the harakeke would be used to add some sweetness.

As we have mentioned in the past, what you wrapped your food in was just as important as the food itself as it would impart flavours during cooking. Often meals would be served on woven harakeke plates, or some other similar plant leaf. As such, even the plates could absorb a bit of oil and juices from the food on them and depending on what they were made of, even the plates were edible! Or at the very least, biodegradable. When eating, the fingers were the preferred utensil but in certain circumstances a pointy stick or fern stalk would be used. These circumstances could be a disability of some kind or something around tapu restrictions meaning they couldn't use their hands, such as recently have moko done or being an extremely tapu tohunga. That isn't to say no utensils were used though, pointed bones would help get meat out of shellfish and shells of paua or mussels would be used to eat thick liquids, such as a jelly like food made from tutu berry and karengo seaweed. If shellfish weren't available, as was the case of more inland Māori, dipping fern stalks or the fingers may be done instead.

So what about some specific plants? Or even, some fungi? Yes, mushrooms were very much on the menu as well for Māori such as hakeke or ear fungus which would often be cooked in a hangi and eaten with pūhā and maybe a few kūmara. It grows on trees in mountainous areas and wasn't very highly regarded, usually only being eaten when other options had been exhausted. Though they did have some medicinal value in curing those who had been poisoned by karaka berries.

Another type of fungi that was eaten was matakupenga or basket fungus. This is a species of fungus that starts out rather compact and then explodes into this nice basket looking formation. Although this basket looks kinda cool, it has a pretty horrid smelling slime oozing out of it in which contains the spores. Eating the matakupenga when it has matured has been known to make people sick so it can only be eaten before it has 'popped', which was pretty much as soon as it appeared above ground so you had to be quick! Apparently the outer skin was quite thick and well liked, being described as "like a soft potato with a rough brownish skin covering a thick jelly like mass." The jelly like mass wasn't eaten though, just the skin, which would be roasted over a fire and often given to those who were sick. However, it was not known to have any medicinal properties, so it could have just been that it was easy to eat.

Along with fungus there is a bunch of green leafy plants that were eaten as well. Poniu or marsh cress was a leafy plant that was "boiled and eaten as cabbage". Which is kinda interesting cause poniu is part of the Brassicaceae family, the same one that broccoli, cauliflower, kale, cabbage and a

whole host of others come from. In marsh cress's case, it was used as an antiscorbutic by Cook when they were low on fresh food. This is just a fancy way of saying that it prevents scurvy, which I'm sure we all know was an ever present danger for long sailing voyages. In fact, Europeans in general were quite impressed with the medicinal properties, saying "the use of these plants restored to health the members of our crew who were the most dangerously ill, even to the ones who could hardly crawl along. One sailor, in particular, whose body was swollen all over, and whose mouth was absolutely rotten, was carried on land two or three times and by eating nothing but these herbs, he got well enough to go on the voyage." It was also said to have a strong smell and hot flavour.

From land cabbage, there was also sea cabbage or karengo or parengo, depending on where you were from. We have talked about parengo in the past when talking about trying to catch kehe but it was also something that was eaten by humans as well as fish. Often it would be lightly boiled or steam but it could also be dried in the sun to the point where it would crack easily in the hand. If dried, it would be put in harakeke baskets to be stored or could even be traded to iwi that live inland for stuff that coastal iwi couldn't obtain as easily, such as kererū. Parengo, along with other seaweeds, could also be mixed with tutu petals and the juice from tutu petals, which would be boiled prior to remove the poison from them. This would make a dark, jelly-like substance that was stored in gourds. It was used as a laxative for medicinal purposes. A bit further in the future, parengo was sent to Māori troops in WWI and WWII, particularly those serving in the Middle East, which is where the Māori Contingent and the famous 28th Battalion, more commonly known as the Māori Battalion, served a significant amount of time. The reason for this was due to the intense heat in that region, so it helped in cooling them off and was said to be quite refreshing.

One I mentioned before was pūhā and if you're from Aotearoa and are either Māori or have a bit of interest in edible bush foods, this is probably one that you have heard of before. Known in English as sow thistle, the leaves and stems could be eaten raw or cooked as well as the juice from it drunk. Often it was eaten with fish with the stems being bruised and washed to get rid of the bitter juice before cooking. The juice itself could also be rubbed on the hand until it became a bit more solid making a sort of chewing gum, which would have a bitter taste that would disappear after a few chews to leave a "special long lasting flavour". The juice could also be mixed with sap from other plants or trees as part of the tā moko ink or to just change the flavour of the chewing gum. The chewing gum would be kept in containers in the whare or buried in the leaves of the korimiko plant for later use. Apparently chewing this gum was a popular pastime, "especially by women, who vied with each other in seeing who could make their pia (gum) crack the loudest." Alternately the juice could be used for medicinal purposes, such as a gentle laxative. Nowadays there are both native and exotic puha as Europe brought its own species of sow thistle.

Mamaku, or black tree fern, is quite common all across Aotearoa, you've probably seen it if you have gone out into the bush. To eat, the inner core of the trunk would be baked and the mature leaves boiled. The only problem with taking out the middle of the trunk is that it would pretty much kill the plant, which meant that this action was protected under various tapu to ensure that people weren't just destroying mamaku willy nilly. Once the trunk was extracted, it would be pierced with a toki and left for a bit, allowing the sap to drain out of it, which was apparently quite bitter. The trunk would then be cut up into workable chunks. The leaves would be prepared by taking off the little pointy projections on them. This was done by putting them into a stream and rubbing them gently. Once the trunk and leaves were properly prepared, they would be put into a hangi with rangiora leaves laid on top and a flax mat on top of that, then the whole thing was buried as normal. To cook mamaku, the volcanic rocks at the bottom of the hangi weren't covered in water, as they normally were to steam the food. In this case, they were left alone to bake the mamaku for 12hrs, at which

point it would be dug up and left to cool. The trunk would be further split up using mussel shells, scraping it into bowls before drying and storing. Alternatively, it could be sliced up thinly and threaded onto muka to hang up and dry. According to some Pākehā, mamaku tasted like dried apple and Charles Heaphy even made a tart from mamaku, vines, sugar and some spices, which tasted like a kinda baked apple tart. Others in Wellington made jam from the tree fern while some in Northland used it for pie fillings. As for Māori, they ate it cold and since it was slightly acidic it was seen as a good compliment to the sweet tutu berry.

Another vege that you may have heard of before is mouku or mauku, depending on where you are. In English it is called hen and chicken fern or mother spleenwort, which is just a horrible sounding name, in my opinion. Although, you probably haven't heard it by any of these names, most would know it as pikopiko. It's a fern native to Aotearoa that is eaten when it is in their small shoot stage, when it is a little green spiral kinda thing. It would be steamed in hangi to make up the vege greens portion of a meal and would later be replaced by European cabbage. Though it could also be used to add some extra 'zest' to foods. It was apparently a good source of sustenance as the rangatira Rangihāeta was said to have survived only on pikopiko when he was on the run in the bush.

Nau was another plant that Cook used to prevent scurvy and as such, in English, it was aptly named Cook's Scurvy Grass. Māori would boil it and sometimes eat it in a similar manner as cabbage, though nau had more of a "characteristic bitter-hot nip" which was fairly common among native New Zealand plants. Currently this plant is considered nationally endangered, possibly due to the introduction of browsing animals like cows, goats and sheep.

From the nīkau palm tree the immature flowers and berries would be eaten but the heart of the leaves where they grow from was the part that was most desired and could be eaten raw. The problem with taking the heart, called a rito, was the same as taking the inner trunk of the mamaku, it would kill the plant so it wasn't done all that often. Nīkau tended to be steamed in a hangi instead of cooked in embers as the later wouldn't cook it enough. Apparently the tree had slight laxative properties and would be fed to pregnant women to help induce labour. When not eaten as a medicine, it was sometimes accompanied by eel. One guy, John Joliffe who ate rito in 1851 said it was "very good to eat, either raw or cooked. When raw it tastes like chestnut, sweet, white and crisp; when boiled it is an excellent vegetable. It was also eaten uncooked and mixed with a salad", while another, William Hay said it was "like celery and coconut in combination; it is refreshing and wholesome".

Raupō is something we mentioned way back in the social structure episodes where we talked about its use in the construction of whare. That wasn't their only use though as they could also be eaten, particularly as young shoots, either raw, steamed or boiled. roots could be dug up from about 2m down and the outer skin removed with the taste being described as "not unlike flour mixed with cream" as well as "mild and refreshing". The roots could be made into a porridge like substance called rerepe, which would be made by pounding them and putting them in boiling water. This was said to have tasted like sweet corn. The pollen would also be eaten raw or made into cakes. Pungapunga bread would be made by collecting the pollen in baskets and wrapping it in leaves and putting it in a hangi. This would form a solid yellow mass, which tasted sweet. The pollen could also be eaten with mashed beetles and grubs to be steamed. One source even claimed that raupō was an aphrodisiac for women!

Rimurapa, bull kelp, is one we have talked about a bit in regards to store tītī, muttonbird. However it could be eaten on its own as well, most often by Māori in the South Island. It would be cooked in a fire before being soaked in a stream to help remove any of the blackened parts and then eaten.

Children were told not to cook the kelp on the days that the men went out in the waka to fish as this would cause the wind to blow, potentially putting them in danger. Rimurapa could also be turned into a jelly by soaking it in fresh water to get the salt out, dried and then mixed with tutu berry juice.

We couldn't have a discussion about food and cooking without once again looking at the king of the Māori diet, kūmara. Kūmara was really diverse in its preparation, it could be baked in the embers of a fire, boiled in salt water or dried in the sun. Often it was served with garnishes of some sort of fish, either dried or boiled. When kūmara was boiled, the whole thing would be chucked in the hue, stem, roots and all, with the left over water being applied to pimples and other skin conditions to alleviate them or drunk to counter fevers. When kūmara was dried it was called kao and required a fair amount of effort to prepare. The best and biggest tubers were selected when they were about 2/3 ripe and kept in a rua until they were properly dry. They would then be taken out and the skin scraped off with a shell or a piece of supplejack and dried once again, this time on a platform in the sun, making sure to turn them each day and covered up at night. Once dried again, they would be steamed in a hangi for 12-16hrs, though they had to be careful that the kūmara wasn't too dry, else it would crumble at this stage but if after steaming it was too soft, the kūmara could simply be dried again. Once done, they could be stored wrapped in a mokimoki fern to impart a unique flavour and left until the winter. When winter came around and the kao was pulled out to eat, it would be softened in a fire, crumbled and mixed with water to make a kinda porridge like substance, which you have probably noticed is a bit of a theme here. Alternately it could be pounded into cakes. Kao could also be eaten as a sweet during feasts or taken on long journeys as a snack that would travel well. It was also given to those who were very sick, often as the first meal after someone had recovered from a fairly bad illness. Depending on the iwi, the roots were used in slightly different ways. Te Arawa would pound them to make a drink, whereas other iwi preferred to use the roots to make a cake served with a garnish of tī kouka root, eating it kinda like a cracker with cheese.

Next time, we will be doing another as yet undecided dramatic retelling of a Māori legend. After that we will move into a new topic. It's gonna be all about unadulterated fun with the games they played in their spare time. From sports games to children's games and even board games!

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on historyaotearoa.com. You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. This podcast is a one man band, if you enjoy listening to me talk history, you can support us through Patreon, buy merch or give us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!