

This episode contains references to war and everything that goes with it. Listener discretion is advised.

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 117: It's How You Use It. This podcast is recorded in Te Whanganui a Tara on the rohe of Muaūpoko, Taranaki Whānui, Te Atiawa and Ngāti Toa Rangatira. We are generously supported by our amazing Patrons, like Alison and Kimela. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we started talking about Māori weapons beginning with the shortest like patu and moved towards the longer ones like taiaha. Today we will talk about some more weapons that are similar to taiaha in terms of length but are a lot different in how they were used.

The pouwhenua is probably the simplest of the three long weapons, especially since it wasn't generally carved or decorated as much as the taiaha but the two are very similar with both a pointy end and a bashing end. The only bit of carving the pouwhenua has is a small carved band about 40cm from the tip called the whakawhiti. There were some pouwhenua that were extensively carved but these seem to have been for ceremonial purposes or for trade to Europeans rather than combat. Although the two weapons occupy the same niche, they do have a number of practical differences, such as the taiaha has a much more broad speartip that is quite flat, whereas the pouwhenua is more pointed, like a pencil. The other end with the club like shape is also much more flared out on the pouwhenua, overall making it look more like a paddle. Again, like the taiaha, the two ends of the pouwhenua were used to crush and stab, the idea being the tip, which would be hardened in a fire, would be thrust into an enemy to finish them off after they had been struck with the club end. The club of the pouwhenua would be used to target pretty much any part of the body, but commonly the head, shoulders, torso and legs with the pole being designed to slide a bit in the hand to allow for the best strike.

Given their similarity, both the pouwhenua and taiaha are made in the same way or very close to it. To start, a long, single piece of timber would be cut down to the roughly correct diameter with a toki, adze. Much like sanding, this would start with larger, heavier toki to do the bulk of the work and then move on to smaller ones as the desired size and shape was gradually reached. Sandstone or pumice would then be rubbed on the wood to sand it down and make it smooth, or at least as smooth as possible since it would leave a ripple effect. The weapon would then be finished by rubbing the trunk of a fern on it to give it a kinda glossy, polished look. Sometimes wooden weapons would be oiled on occasion, either with shark oil or if it was really special, human fat. At some point during this process the pointed tip would be put into a fire to harden it and make it more durable but while a pouwhenua wasn't being used they were often left in the rafters of a whare so that the smoke from the fire in the house could continue to harden the whole weapon.

The third weapon in the long category is less famous than the taiaha but is still quite well known and has an even bigger reputation of being a chiefly weapon. Tewhatewha are long handled staffs with a broad axe-like head at the top. Just like the other long weapons, these are made from a single piece of wood, usually rata and mānuka trees but in Te Urewera there are some examples made of maire. The pole of the tewhatewha was usually oval shaped and had a raised carved bit about 40cm from the end, just like the pouwhenua. The carving usually depicted a couple of heads and may have had the practical purpose of stopping the hand from slipping too far down the shaft when it became wet. In terms of length, tewhatewha were on the shorter end of the long weapons at about 1.1m. They could be even shorter but these were probably used for ceremonial purposes. Naturally the most striking part of the tewhatewha is the axe head, which had a large, flat surface that was great to have a carved design on. Upon first glance you might think that this axe part is what was used to strike, that the tewhatewha is a chopping weapon but on closer inspection you will see that the axe is blunt

and in fact this part didn't make contact with the enemy at all, assuming it was used correctly. The back of the axe head is what was used to strike an opponent, the axe itself acting to add more force of weight to the blow rather than doing damage on its own accord. At the bottom of the axe a hole would be drilled to allow a cord to be put through where some feathers would be tied, usually *kererū* or *kahu*, which swished around in front of the enemy's face and would distract them. From there the *toa* could quickly poke them with the pointed end of the *tewhatewha*, smack them with the back of the axe, preferably in the head, and then stab them again to finish them off. As I mentioned earlier, *tewhatewha* are considered to be very chiefly weapons, sometimes being called *rakau rangatira*, which is the literal translation. They were most often wielded by *rangatira* on the *marae* in *whaikorero* or used to mark time for those paddling in a *waka taua*. The most unique use of *tewhatewha* though was to signal to troops during battle to attack, retreat and so on. Since it was a unique looking weapon, especially with the feathers dangling off of it, it stood out and could be easily seen in the chaos of battle making it great for signalling. The *tewhatewha* wasn't as common as *taiaha* or *patu* given it was really only for chiefs but since it was kinda interesting to look at and unusual, collectors acquired lots of examples so they are really well represented in collections around the world. Ones still with the feathers are particularly sought after.

The last thing I want to say about all three of the long weapons, *taiaha*, *pouwhenua* and *tewhatewha* is that hopefully you have picked up that all of these were wielded in a similar fashion. Held along the shaft and struck with a series of quick thrusts, strikes or parries, using feints with one end of the weapon only to strike with the other was a common tactic. All of these weapons, if wielded with sufficient force, could kill in a single blow.

The weapons we have talked about previously were all mostly used by chiefs and nobles. They were well decorated with carvings or feathers and particularly significant ones that were wielded by important people might be named or passed down through the generations. The weapons we will talk about for the rest of the episode, the extra long weapons, aren't chiefly, aren't decorated and weren't passed down. They were easy to use, quick to make and often disposable. They were the weapons wielded by the masses, weapons of the people. If you know anything about pre-gunpowder warfare basically anywhere in the world you can likely guess what form these extra long weapons took. Spears are quick to make and take very little skill to use so whether it be *fyrds* or *taua*, long pointy sticks were great to equip your less skilled troops. So, Māori weren't particularly unique in figuring this out but the interesting stuff is in the detail of how Māori designed their spears to make them just that extra bit deadly, resulting in a number of types for both thrusting and throwing. Unfortunately, they're a bit hard to group cause different *iwi* have different names for the same design of spear and some *iwi* will use the same name for different spears but we are going to talk about the ones that come up most commonly in the literature.

Huata were the longest spear Māori had at about 5 to 7.5m long with a pointed tip and sometimes a rounded butt. It was also pretty thin being 2.5cm in diameter at its widest. They were usually made from *tawa* or *rimu*, preferably a tree that was tall and mature since they split more easily. *Toki* would be used to get the wood to the desired size before removing any bumps by scraping a sharp stone or shell along it. The spear would be finished off with sandstone to smooth it out and sometimes the underside of a fern. The point could be hardened by fire and shark oil rubbed all along it to give it a nice finish and prevent splitting. Sometimes it was decorated with *kurī* fur as well which was tied to the shaft just above the butt. The idea behind *huata*, as described by missionary William Colenso, was "used in defending their forts and stockades, being thrust through the palisades at close quarters against the legs and bodies of the invaders". Palisades in *pā*, hill forts, were generally held together with horizontal posts so the *huata* would be leaned on top of those as it was thrust out

against the enemy. Huata could also be used to attack pā, though it was much more rare and generally didn't involve using the spears in a conventional fashion. One example of this is of Tuhoē attacking a pā by tying bundles of ferns to their huata and setting them alight, attempting to burn the walls and buildings within. With everything on fire and smoke filling the pā the defenders fled and Tuhoē captured the fort. When not in use, much like other weapons, huata were kept in a specially built armory or in the rafters of a whare. Tokotoko were basically shorter huata at about 3- 3.5m long, meaning that it could be used in close quarters combat. We actually don't know a lot about tokotoko as not much is mentioned by European writers and a lot of info has been lost.

While huata were the longest spears Māori had, tao were the most common. Again, it was pretty similar with a blunt butt and fire hardened tip, it was about 2.1-2.7m long, getting a bit thicker at the blunt end. It was usually made from mānuka, maire, rimu, hināu or other woods depending on what was available. The shaft could have some carving but this was rare. Overall it was pretty simple and sometimes mass produced but that isn't to say it wasn't lethal in the right hands and it was actually often the weapon of choice when someone decided to go out and seek utu. Most likely the tao was the quintessential everyman or peasants weapon since it was easy to make, made from easy to access materials and simple to use. Again, on the flip side, taiaha, patu etc were often highly decorated (meaning they took longer to make), were difficult to manufacture, were made from high value materials and took a fair amount of training to use correctly, hence why they were used by the aristocracy. However, since the fancy chiefs didn't use them that much, we don't know a lot about tao. One of the few stories about tao comes after European arrival where an elder would often demonstrate to the rangatahi how to use one. However, according to the European writer, the kids only afforded him the time of day out of respect rather than a genuine interest in how to use the weapon as muskets had already become the favoured armament.

Koikoi were roughly the same size, about 2- 2 and a half metres in length. Their main point of difference to the other spears was that they had both ends pointed rather than only one. They were very common in pre-European Aotearoa but we don't have many examples today, probably cause it wasn't exciting to look at like the more carved weapons.

Titama were also about the same length as the tao and koikoi but seems to have been used for throwing as well as hand to hand combat. Whether it was thrown or held on to and thrust seems to have differed between iwi. You may recall a story that we talked about a while ago from Ngāti Kahungungu who were defending their pā against a Waikato iwi. A champion stepped forth and offered to throw his spear at a man behind the Waikato chief to try show his prowess but instead threw it at the chief himself and killed him. Well, the weapon he used there is a titama. This sort of thing was fairly common with the titama being used a lot when meeting manuhiri, throwing a spear to land in front of them to show battle prowess and dissuade any funny business. This occurred a number of times when Europeans arrived which resulted in the newcomers firing on Māori since they didn't understand what was going on.

Tete are some of the more 'fun' spears. They were mostly used for thrusting but sometimes throwing too, being made the same way as most other spears. The point of difference, shall we say, that tete brought was the grooved notch at the front into which a detachable point could be set. This point, called a matarere, was usually made of a hard wood, whalebone, human bone or the barb of a stingray and was held in place by a small cord wrapped around it. Some tete would have a small amount of carving but more often had tufts of kurī fur tied on if someone wanted to jazz it up. As you might expect, the idea of the detachable point was to get it to release and be stuck in the victim, making it difficult to remove, do more damage if it was removed or maybe cause it to get infected. Stingray barbs were great for this cause they are naturally counter serrated, basically they have lots

of tiny sharp points facing in the opposite direction to the main point of the barb, meaning if it was pulled out then it would cut even more into the already open wound.

These weapons were nasty, designed to inflict a horrific amount of damage but they weren't what Māori feared most on the battlefield. That honour belonged to the absolutely fucken brutal tarearea. Every single weapon we have talked about, and even the couple more we still haven't, don't even compare to tarearea. They were still spears, varying in length but were about 3m on average. The idea was similar to the tete, that of a detachable point, except the point was barbed meaning unlike even the most terrifying stingray barb which is still sorta evolved to allow removal, these were designed to stay in the wound except at great cost. Additionally, it wasn't explicitly detachable in the sense that the tete point was separate to the rest of the pole and wrapped with a cord. The tarearea barb was actually part of the whole weapon and just kinda designed to break off upon being stabbed into someone, resulting in a piece of wood that was terribly difficult to remove which could cause more damage and possibly infection. To me, this reads like a tarerarerera was a one time use item whereas a tete was multiple use, especially since tete also had carving on them sometimes, indicating more investment in the weapon. Some accounts mention the tarearea was thrown too, as was the case when it was used against Marion du Fresne and his men in 1772, which caused a few of his men to get quite severely injured. James Cook even said that "They handle all their arms with great agility, particularly their long pikes or lances, against which we have no weapon that is an equal match except a loaded musquet." John Rutherford, sometimes known as the White Chief for being a Pakehā-Māori, saw a barb being removed from someone's thigh, which involved cutting it out with a shell, leaving a sizeable gash. If the spear missed or the end didn't break off correctly, it could be thrown back by the enemy and in one case that Elsdon Best saw, a man was killed by his own spear that was thrown back.

To finish up, let's talk about some longer weapons that sit a little outside the standard categories of short, long and extra long. There's always exceptions to every rule and nothing fits neatly into boxes! The hoeroa is probably the most unusual Māori weapon when compared to the others. We actually still don't really know what it was for or how it was used and in fact there is some debate about whether it is a weapon at all. Some scholars suggest it's perhaps a staff used to show chiefly authority, though that is a minority view. It was made from the jaw of a sperm whale and measured about 1.5-1.8m long and was 5-8cm in width. Due to the nature of the jaw that it was made from, the hoeroa had a slight concave curve to it. Carving was usually on the butt however the hoeroa was quite flat so there could be some carving along the surface too. Additionally, they were occasionally adorned with hawk feathers or kurī fur on special occasions. Again, we aren't really sure how it was used, some say it was purely for striking whereas others say that it was used for parrying and other movements in a similar way to a taiaha. Alternatively, a hypothesis supported by Te Rangi Hīroa was that the hoeroa was used at range by throwing it underarm at a fleeing enemy and then retrieved by pulling on a cord.

The kopere was a dart and in its most minimalist form was just a sharpned mānuka stick. They were usually about 60-90cm, though there are some, mostly from Tuhoe, that were nearly 3m long. The dart would be propelled by a kotaha which was a stick with a cord on it, which the kopere would be tied to and whipped around to throw it at the enemy. Kotaha sometimes had elaborate carvings of heads at their base, inlaid with paua. Kopere and kotaha are pretty much the only examples of ranged weapons used by Māori so there is some doubt whether they were around prior to European arrival but there are reports of it being used against Marion du Fresne in 1772 which may indicate that it is older than that. Both du Fresne and Best acknowledge that the weapon was not very accurate but it could go very far.

It was generally accepted in pre-European times that a person armed with short weapon, like a patu, would usually win over someone wielding a longer one, like a taiaha or tewhatewha. I wasn't able to find a specific reason for this but perhaps it was because Māori combat relied on being quick and fleet of foot so someone with a short weapon would often close the gap quickly rendering the longer weapons advantage of reach useless and turn it into a disadvantage. There were some weapons that were considered particularly tapu, perhaps because it was an heirloom weapon that many great rangatira had held. These were treated with great respect and care, especially when the weapon was brought back from battle. If the tapu was defiled that weapon might not be as effective or even worse might bring misfortune on future taua so treating it with the proper tikanga in accordance with its tapu status was very important.

Over the last two episodes you will likely have noticed that there isn't necessarily a great variety of weapon classes that were used by Māori, mostly short clubs and long spears. Yes, there is lots of variation within that but broadly speaking there wasn't too much beyond, like axes or swords. The limit on the amount of weapon types and the fact Māori didn't have access to other weapons like bows and arrows, muskets or just the limitation on not having access to metal and smithing means that warfare was kept relatively low key, in the grand scheme of things. Obviously once firearms arrived, the game absolutely changed and rendered the normal Māori weaponry obsolete basically overnight.

Next time, we will be talking about the other military innovation that rocked the Māori world but this occurred 300 years before the Musket Wars. This saw a total change in the way Māori waged war and even in some respects how they lived their day to day lives. We have mentioned it a few times already but we will be diving deep into the pā.

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. You can help support HANZ through Patreon, buying merch or giving 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!