

## **Pā Harakeke – Information**

This pā harakeke is a cultural plant bank, a plantation of special varieties of NZ flax (*Phormium* spp) which has been established as a shared project between Orokonui Ecosanctuary – Te Korowai o Mihiwaka and Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki. It is located at the ecosanctuary, and plantings began in 2008. This project has been developed and is being maintained through the combined voluntary efforts and goodwill of a large number of people and organisations, for the benefit of all.

### **Kaupapa/Vision**

- To provide open access to high quality varieties of harakeke for respectful use by local weavers and other artists.
- To care for these special plants, and the mātauraka/knowledge pertaining to their use, as a taoka/treasure to be passed on for future generations.
- To provide a related attraction of interest to visitors to the ecosanctuary, emphasising the long cultural link which has existed between Māori and the natural environment in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
- To provide a rich food source for nectar-feeding birds living within the ecosanctuary area.

*He taoka tuku iho mō tātou, ā mō kā uri ā muri ake nei  
A treasure passed down for us, and for our descendants in the future*

### **Where is the Pā Harakeke?**

Located outside the predator-proof fence, and beside the driveway into the ecosanctuary, the pā harakeke can be readily identified by the two pou whenua/symbolic posts, which mark the entrance. As you approach the entrance of the pā harakeke, on the right stands the male **Tāne mahuta**, the kaitiaki/guardian of these special plants/forest, and on the left stands the female **Hine te iwa iwa**, kaitiaki of the traditions pertaining to their use/weaving. From here the track follows a koru/spiral in towards the central weaving platform which is designed to reflect a web woven by pūkāwerewere/spider, the very first weaver of all.

*Tūkia te ururoa, kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke  
Burn off the undergrowth so that the flax shoots may sprout*

### **Using the Pā Harakeke**

- This area is open to all visitors to the ecosanctuary for their enjoyment and use.
- Once the harakeke plants have become established after about three years, weavers are welcome to harvest leaves, provided they follow the tikaka/guidelines set out below which will help ensure the health and sustainability of these plants.

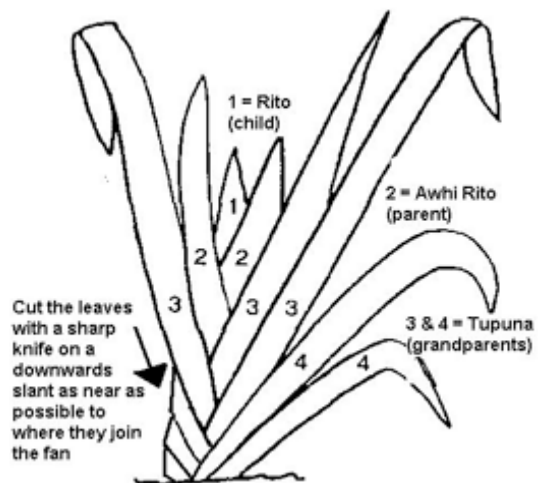
- Any weaver seeking to transplant a cutting/fan from any of the varieties for their own use is invited to discuss this with the rūnaka office.
- Any visitors or users of the pā harakeke are encouraged to help with its maintenance, in ways such as trimming plants, weeding, cutting grass or by koha/donation. This can be discussed with either the ecosanctuary manager or the rūnaka office.

*Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi*

*Through your contribution, and my contribution, the people will flourish*

### **Tikaka/Guidelines**

- Do not cut either the rito (1) or the awhi rito (2); use only the tūpuna (3&4) leaves.
- Dispose neatly of any leaf material that is cut off on the compost piles around the outside of the pā harakeke.
- Do not harvest harakeke when kōrari/flower stalks are actively growing on the plant.
- Cut the leaves so that both sides of each fan are left balanced.
- Do not harvest harakeke during the rain, in a frost, or at night.
- Within the pā harakeke, do not eat while you are working with harakeke.
- Traditionally, women who are pregnant, menstruating or unwell do not harvest harakeke.



Culturally, a pā harakeke is a metaphor for fertility and productivity

*Aitia te wahine o te pā harakeke*

*Marry the woman of the flax plantation*

## Plant Species

The pā harakeke contains three groups of plants of special cultural significance:

- **Harakeke.** Lowland or swamp flax. *Phormium tenax*. This plant was of immense importance to Māori in former times. Its strong and flexible leaves and whītau/muka/fibre can readily be used for kākahu/clothing, whāriki/mats, kete/baskets, taura/ropes, kupeka/nets, and hundreds of other purposes. Many parts of the plant also have rokoa/medicinal uses, and the kōrari/flower stalks were used for rafts and floats, while the nectar was used to sweeten other foods. Many of these cultural traditions are being maintained and expanded upon today by weavers and other artists, and traditional health practitioners. Leaves of this species can grow up to 3m long, and the flowers on the kōrari are usually reddish, with the seed pods standing erect.
- **Wharariki.** Mountain or coastal flax. *Phormium cookianum*. While being of lesser importance as a source of fibre, this smaller plant also had a number of special uses, and was important in areas where harakeke was not growing. These flowers usually have a yellow tinge, and the seed pods hang down, and are often twisted.
- **Other plants.** Near the centre of the pā harakeke are being planted samples of a number of other native plants with specialist uses for weaving and related cultural purposes. These will include:

*Houi.* Narrow-leafed lacebark. *Hoheria angustifolia* & other spp

*Kāretu.* Scented holy grass. *Hierochloa redolens*

*Kiekie.* *Freycinetia banksii*

*Neinei.* *Dracophyllum latifolium* & other spp

*Pātūtū.* Taru. Silver tussock. *Poa cita* & other spp

*Pīkao.* Golden sand sedge. *Ficinia (Desmoschoenus) spiralis*

*Pirita.* Kareao. Supplejack. *Ripogonum scandens*

*Rauaruhe.* Bracken. *Pteridium esculentum*

*Taramea.* Papāi. Speargrass. *Aciphylla colensoi* & other spp

*Tī.* Kouka. Maru. Cabbage tree. *Cordyline australis*

*Tikumū.* Mountain daisy. *Celmisia semi-cordata* & other spp

*Toetoe.* Kākaho. *Cortaderia richardii* & other spp

*Tōtō.* Mountain cabbage tree. *Cordyline indivisa*

*Tōtara.* *Podocarpus totara*

*Kua tupu te pā harakeke*

*The flax plantation is flourishing*

## Harakeke Varieties

Because of its immense cultural importance, many of the diverse range of varieties or cultivars of harakeke have been gathered, protected, treasured and shared by Māori over the centuries, and have been passed down to us. A certain variety may be valued because of the strength, length or colour of its whītau/muka, while another may

perhaps be cherished because of its flexibility and ease for working by young fingers. For some of these varieties this wealth of mātauraka/cultural knowledge is being confirmed and supplemented by ongoing contemporary technological research.

The most important qualities of each of these varieties can best be explored by weavers working directly with the plant material, and sharing this experience with others. There are however other important diagnostic features which can help us distinguish between these varieties just by looking closely at them, such as:

- Growth habit of the plant
- Leaf width, length, thickness, flexibility and colour, including colour of leaf margins and keel for similar aged leaves
- Flower colour and form
- Kōrari number, size and seed pod shape
- It should be realised however that the location, soil type, exposure, etc of a plant can greatly influence some of these features

The majority of the varieties in this pā harakeke have come from two main sources:

- **Dunedin Botanic Gardens.** A large collection of harakeke and wharariki varieties was donated to the gardens in 1909 by the Matthews family who were nurserymen and foresters. Plants from over a hundred of these varieties are now growing in the pā harakeke, some of which are thought to be of local southern origin. It is possible that a few of these may be duplicates. Our understanding of the properties of these varieties is growing as weavers share their accumulated experiences, and some of these varieties have been the subject of recent research carried out at the University of Otago.
- **Rene Orchiston Collection.** Over 50 varieties of harakeke and wharariki were collected from weavers and Māori settlements around NZ between the 1950s and the 1980s by Rene Orchiston of Gisborne; these are now part of a national collection which is cared for by Landcare Research at Lincoln. Some of these varieties have been shared with the pā harakeke, either directly from Lincoln, or via other donors who have been caring for some of the varieties from this collection in their own plantations. Mātauraka related to these varieties is well-documented.

Weavers are encouraged to share their experience gained in using any of these varieties. The pā harakeke project would also be receptive to the donation of other treasured varieties that weavers may, from time to time, offer to share in this way.

Some further information about the special qualities and suggested uses of some of these many varieties will be available on the rūnaka website.

A number of other websites and publications also provide a wealth of information on this unique plant, its ecological importance, and its rich cultural associations.

*He puāwaitaka nō te harakeke, he rito whakakī i kā whāruarua  
Just as the flax will flower, so too will a new shoot grow to fill the empty space*

## **Flax Industry**

Hand-dressed harakeke – whītau or muka – was an important trade item between Māori and Pākehā traders throughout the country in the early decades of the 1800s as the superior qualities of this fibre for ropes and numerous other uses became widely known internationally. From the 1860s, alongside European settlement grew a thriving industry where flax leaf was dressed mechanically in over 300 flax mills around the country. There were several of these mills around Waitati from the 1860s to 1880s, with the remnants of a water race which powered a flax mill via a water-wheel still visible in the lower Orokonui valley. While the high quality of flax fibre remains undiminished, this industry finally ceased in the 1970s as synthetic fibres became more universally used.

*Me te wai kōrari*

*Like the nectar of the flax flower*

## **Birds in the Pā Harakeke**

Located as it is immediately adjacent to the protected pest-free enclosure of the ecosanctuary, birdlife in the pā harakeke is also something special. The sweet nectar in the flowers of the harakeke and wharariki provides a rich seasonal food supply for tūi and korimako/bellbird, while they in turn pollinate the flowers. The insectivorous birds help keep the plants free from the destructive effects of the native ‘windower’ and ‘notcher’ caterpillars. This damage can also be averted by keeping the plants well-trimmed, with no build-up of dead leaves around their base. Visitors to the pā harakeke may also enjoy the swoosh of plump kererū and the inquisitive challenge of miromiro/tomtīt. If you are patient, you may perhaps even hear or see secretive mātā/fernbird.

*Hūtia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea te kōmako e kō?*

*If the heart is torn from the flax bush, where then will the bellbird sing?*

## **Contacts for the Pā Harakeke**

*Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki.* 03 465 7300 [www.puketeraki.co.nz](http://www.puketeraki.co.nz)

*Orokonui Ecosanctuary – Te Korowai o Mihiwaka.* 03 482 1755

[www.oroconui.org.nz](http://www.oroconui.org.nz)