

The expedition did not discover any traces of living humanity until they got well into the Urewera country. In crossing one of the many mountain streams which were passed, the traces of a man, woman, and two children were discovered in the bed of the stream.

The experienced woodmen of the force decided that the tracks were two or three days old. A party of twelve of the most active was detached, with orders to follow them up. The pursuit was successful, and the pursuers surprised a woman and child. The woman informed her captors that her husband was absent pig-hunting, and she expected he would shortly appear. The men took cover round the place, and patiently awaited his arrival. They had not long to wait. The unsuspecting man was seen to approach with a dead pig on his back, followed by his son (who carried a gun) and four dogs. On nearing, the woman called out, "Haere mai," which at once aroused his suspicions; he threw his load from him, and scaled the heights, as only an Urewera can do, before the would-be captors were aware of his intention, leaving the whole of his family and dogs prisoners. I would here remark that this family lived entirely upon pigs, eels, and the tender shoots of certain ferns. The woman reported that they had not seen any one for several months, and imparted as a piece of news to her captors that the Europeans and Arawa had attacked Ruatahuna, a circumstance which occurred twelve months ago.

The children were naked. The woman, children, &c., were brought away. A day or two after this the advancing force succeeded in capturing another small party, consisting of five individuals; two men, however, succeeded in escaping. The force was ordered to move on, and halted about two miles further on for the night. Ropata then sent back a picked force to surround the place where they had made the last capture, giving it as his opinion that the two men would return to ascertain the fate of the rest of the party. Ropata judged rightly. The place was surrounded, and the two men captured.

Major Ropata selected from these prisoners two men to act as guides, and it will presently be seen that they did not abuse the confidence reposed in them.

The advance had been carried out with so much skill and judgment that not a single individual had escaped in the direction of Maungapowhatu, although a fear had been expressed that the first man who escaped had carried the news of the approach of a hostile force in that direction.

Ropata gave it as his opinion that the man who had escaped, if a man at all, was hovering in their rear, expecting every moment to pick up the dead bodies of his wife and children, and in this case it is believed that the judgment of this bold and sagacious leader was not at fault.

From information derived from the prisoners, Major Ropata learnt that there were two considerable kaingas at Maungapowhatu (the old pa itself had not been occupied for years), and it was his plan to surprise both simultaneously. Ropata commanded the advance upon the village to the left (the most difficult), and intrusted the command of the other to Lieutenant Porter, leaving the principal part of the force in rear under Henare Potae.

Mr. Porter's party, under the guidance of one of the prisoners, completely surrounded the kainga intrusted to him, not a single individual escaping. Amongst the prisoners was a man of note belonging to the Urewera proper, named Ihairaira Motu, the rest were Ngatikowhatu, properly belonging to Upper Wairoa and Waikare-Moana.

Major Ropata was not so successful; by some means the enemy were made aware of the approach, and had just time to effect their escape. One of his young men having strayed too far, was ambuscaded and shot dead, and after a slight skirmish, Ropata recalled his men, intending to rest that day, and follow up the pursuit to Ruatahuna on the next. But on the following morning, to Ropata's great disgust and annoyance, he received a letter from Major Kemp to the effect that he had agreed to a truce with Tamaikowha and the Urewera.

Ropata hesitated how to act, but after some deliberation decided to respect the truce concluded, although he considered that the truce was broken by the shooting of one of his men. He, however, wrote letters to the Urewera chiefs, couched in unmistakable language, to the effect that he reluctantly yielded to the truce made by Major Kemp, but that if he heard anything more of them and their hostile proceedings, he would return next summer and destroy them utterly. This letter was sent by Ihairaira Motu. This man, it was discovered, had actually murdered Bennett White. This discovery added greatly to Ropata's chagrin.

Ropata was greatly disappointed at this sudden termination of his march, but as it will be by-and-by seen, it was a matter for congratulation rather than otherwise, as his subsequent proceedings greatly contributed to the success of the Waioeka expedition.

At Mangapowhatu Ropata first heard of the attack by Te Kooti on the Whakatohea at Opape, and the death of the two Arawa young men, and he at once gave orders for his people to march by the Waimana River to Ohiwa.

This he did in forced marches, arriving at Ohiwa in two days and a half. The march from Turanga was accomplished in twenty days, which is a clear proof that not much time was lost, considering that the force was encumbered with above fifty prisoners, men, women, and children.

At Ohiwa Ropata met Major Kemp, whose protracted inaction can hardly be explained away. Ropata exclaimed, "Why, I left you here when I went to the East Coast to raise my men, and here you are still." Ropata arranged to be at Opotiki on the following day.

Kemp returned to his people at Opotiki the same afternoon, and seemed to be infused with a new life, and effectually roused from his late inactivity, it may be presumed, by the vigour displayed by his fellow in arms. He ordered his men to march forthwith in pursuit of Te Kooti.

On arriving the next morning, Major Ropata was astonished to find that the Wanganui had already left. As his own men were tired, and in want of rations, he could not at once follow, but after twenty-four hours' rest, and having procured a supply of food, he started in pursuit.

I ought to explain here the lines of march of the two columns. Major Kemp was joined by the Chief Wiremu Kingi, of the Ngaitai, and a considerable number of the Whakatohea, who happened to be absent with the Whanganui when Te Kooti made the raid upon their settlements at Opape.

These counselled Major Kemp to advance on Maraetahi (the pa said to be occupied by Te Kooti and his followers in the Waioeka River), by the gorge formed by the Opotiki River; after ascending which for a considerable distance, to strike a leading spur of the watershed range which separates the Waioeka and Opotiki Rivers, and to advance along its summit.