

Kawhia and Aotea commenced to give us a taste of obstruction by interfering with the surveyor who was laying off the road from Raglan to Aotea. They waited patiently until the work had got as far as the confiscation line, when they opposed it from that point by pulling up the pegs and otherwise interfering with the work. Unfortunately at this time an order came to stop the formation of the road, so that the Natives, instead of being intimidated, were emboldened by what they had done: proof of which was furnished a short time afterwards, when, it having been found necessary to erect beacons and place buoys within the Kawhia Harbour, these same Natives boldly went and knocked down one and pulled up the others. What further trouble they might have caused, it is impossible to say, as at that time a force of one hundred Armed Constabulary, under Major Tuke, was landed at Kawhia, and, after erecting a redoubt, took up their permanent residence there; whereupon the Native difficulties, of which there seemed every sign of being a plentiful crop, suddenly vanished, and nothing more has been heard of them. A Native, named Te Tihirahi, was the leader of what troubles did take place, and although it was said that he acted on his own responsibility, and without the sanction of Tawhiao, I cannot help thinking that, even if he did not actually get his instructions from headquarters at Whatiwhatiho, where the Maori Cabinet meets, his action, although openly condemned by Tawhiao, was secretly supported, if not instigated, by at least one member of that Cabinet.

During this time a section of the Kawhia Natives called Ngatihikairo, who claim to be the owners of the land in the vicinity of the north side of the harbour, and extending to the top of Pirongia Mountain, were holding meetings amongst themselves, and discussing the advisableness of surveying their lands and putting them through the Court. At a meeting that the Hon. the Native Minister afterwards had with them at their settlement at Kawhia, it was finally settled they should do so, and applications were signed and sent to the Native Land Court accordingly. I think that these people (the Ngatihikairo) deserve credit for taking the initiative in this matter, and for the determined way in which they acted all through, notwithstanding the threats and opposition of the Waikatos. There is no doubt that a great deal of bad feeling was engendered between those two tribes by this action of Ngatihikairo; and, had it not been for the presence of the Constabulary Force at Kawhia, it is not at all unlikely but that they would have come to blows. As it was, the Waikatos, finding that they could not awe their opponents with threats and bounce, quietly subsided; but I think the Ngatihikairo title to this block will be hotly disputed by them in the Native Land Court.

This action of the isolated Ngatihikairo in appealing to the law by sending in applications to have their land claims decided by the Native Land Court was only a precursor of what was about to follow in another place, as Ngatimaniapoto, under their leading chiefs Wahanui, Taonui, and Rewi, had for some time previous been discussing amongst themselves the advisableness of doing the very same thing. At a large public meeting which the Hon. the Native Minister subsequently had with them at Kihikihiki in November last, at which nearly all the Ngatimaniapoto chiefs and representative men were present, it was unanimously agreed that they also should send in an application to the Court for the investigation of their claim to the large area of country extending from Aotea, on the West Coast, to Maungatautari (nearly) on the East; thence to Lake Taupo; thence to the summit of Ruapehu Mountain; thence to the sea, coming out on the West Coast at a creek known as Waipingao; and thence along the coast-line to the point of commencement at Aotea. The area of this block is estimated at something like 3,500,000 acres, the whole of which it is proposed to put through the Native Land Court as soon as the survey of same is complete. This large block, however, does not wholly belong to Ngatimaniapoto. They admit that the Whanganui, Ngatiraukawa, and Ngatituwharetoa have claims to portions of it, and representatives from each of those tribes were present at the meeting, and signed the application to Court as representing their people.

There are also other tribes, notably Ngatihaua and Waikato, who, although not admitted by Ngatimaniapoto to be owners, maintain that they have large claims to certain portions of the block within the territory lying northwards of the Mokau River, the Rangitoto Mountain, the Tuhua District, the Maungatautari Mountain, the confiscated line, and the Aotea Harbour. Southward of these boundaries I do not think there will be much dispute, other than amongst the Ngatimaniapoto themselves.

Subsequently another meeting was held by these Natives with Mr. Percy Smith, Assistant Surveyor-General, at which it was agreed that the survey should be proceeded with at once by the Government, with the sanction of all the tribes represented by the applicants, and that the cost of such survey—unless opposed and consequently prolonged by Native obstruction—should not exceed £1,600. (I might here mention that previous to this some of the Natives had commenced negotiations with private parties for this survey, which, had they been completed, would have cost them more than £20,000.)

It was also decided that, in conjunction with this survey of the boundaries of the large block, the Government trig. survey was also to be carried on, as well as the prospecting surveys for the main trunk railway-line (which were already in progress), and within one month from that date all those surveys were in full swing. The Natives, however, made a proviso that no prospecting for gold should be allowed until the land had passed the Court.

It is, I think, almost impossible to over-estimate the value of the results brought about by these meetings, when we take into consideration the fact that only a short time ago these Natives