

# News

## Kruger - fifteen years of intensity

Geoff Mercer  
Editor

THIS week, the man who has arguably done more than anyone alive today to settle Tuhoe's grievances with the Crown will observe the legislation enshrining those endeavours being passed by Parliament's House of Representatives.

But you will never persuade Tamati Kruger he should take credit for any of this.

He would be the first to acknowledge his position as just one of the latest in a long line of Tuhoe who have dedicated a large part of their lives to seeking justice for wrongs perpetrated in the 19th century, and later.

Those who have observed the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process over the past 10 years cannot have failed to observe how the self-effacing 58-year-old has resolutely guided the huge and disparate iwi to one of the most significant and precedent-setting settlements of them all.

In 2007, the setback represented by police raiding Tuhoe homes in search of alleged terrorists rehearsing a 'Plan B' to secure Tuhoe self-government (mana motuhake) rolled off him.

In May 2010, with celebratory pens inscribed and hangi fires poised to be lit, Prime Minister John Key withdrew a settlement offer because, according to Mr Key, parting with Te Urewera was too much for ordinary folk to bear.

Twice bitten, many might have walked away, given up.

Not Mr Kruger. He persevered and his 40,000-strong tribe is the better for it.

Not that everyone agrees.

Many in the community - some Tuhoe hapu, even - are unhappy with the settlement outcome and some of the decisions taken by Te Uru Taumatua Trust, which controls the Tuhoe empire.

**"Some of those people are your friends, your family. And you don't target these**



**A PROUD DAY: Tamati Kruger addresses Tuhoe supporters, Parliamentarians and bureaucrats during a March 23, 2013, ceremony at Parliament, held to witness the Tuhoe Treaty settlement being initialled.**

Photo supplied

life - the deep south was a haven for those seeking refuge from the law and distancing themselves from a variety of pasts.

Eventually, he experienced a call to higher education and travelled to Wellington to enrol at Victoria University.

Ngati Awa kaumatua and accountant Waaka Vercoe, living in Wellington at the time, helped him and he completed a double degree.

Ngati Awa academic Sir Hirini Mead was the head of Maori studies during his senior year. The then Dr Mead invited him to become a junior lecturer and he did.

For Mr Kruger, his university years were about "learning about the world", not about gaining a qualification for financial security later in life.

On a visit to Parliament he remembers being shocked by the behaviour he witnessed in the debating chamber.

"It was a reality check. My view was 'these people are crazy'."

The situations and people he encountered politicised him.

Ahead of the 1981 Springbok

will be. A lot of Tuhoe people confront me about such things. Tuhoe people are brilliant. They like to confront things and some are more forceful than others.

"I've been to meetings where people have been very blunt with their opinion and views that I'm wrong."

People have never said it to his face but he is aware, from second or third parties. Others accuse him of being fraudulent, a liar, and say that he is stealing iwi money, or somebody else's.

"It's hurtful, but again, these are easy [allegations] to throw when you are frustrated.

"I believe time will prove such people wrong but I haven't time to stop and have discussions with individuals because that will stop me from doing the big stuff.

"If I do, that [would pander] to my ego, which is irrelevant."

He says spending \$15 million on Te Kura Whare when the iwi has been "consistently poor for a century" was bound to raise eye-

brows and prompt grumblings.

"I've said to people 'this building does not take away from our commitment to education, health, housing, roading and infrastructure'.

"That building is not an office; it's a symbol and an image for all Tuhoe that the world is changing for them, and that building symbolises the end of a long term of disappointment and injustice, and it means something else; it should be an inspiration to Tuhoe people.

"What they can do and what the future holds for them. It's where we work from ... where we will convert dreams into reality [but] that building is not in competition with hapu. It's not a marae."

He says health, welfare and housing programmes the iwi is rolling out have eased the suspicions of Tuhoe people but he realises there will still be unhappy people out there.

"But, I'm sure their children and grandchildren will have a different opinion."

### The Settlement:

■ A Crown apology

■ The creation of Te Urewera (formerly a national park) as a separate legal entity, governed by Crown and Tuhoe nominees

■ Mana motuhake redress provides for improved delivery of government and iwi services to Tuhoe communities

■ Cultural redress recognises traditional, historical, cultural and spiritual associations Tuhoe has with Crown-owned sites within its area of interest

■ Financial redress of \$170, including the Central North Island forestry settlement of 2008.

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your friends, your family. And you don't target these people ... you don't intend to cause discomfort ... but that's just what happens."

- Tamati Kruger

Asked what being unpopular is like, Mr Kruger is frank.

"I've come to accept that this is an unavoidable part of work like this."

When one urges change and promotes new ways of doing things, people "who have grown comfortable with how things are, experience upset", he says.

"Some of those people are your friends, your family. And you don't target these people ... you don't intend to cause discomfort ... but that's just what happens."

"The cost is around relationships and friendships. You do find that, overnight, you have people that despise you, but there are others that become allies and supporters, and throughout there's an ebbing flow of those people."

"The other thing is that you don't have privacy anymore; you're on 24-hour call," he told the *BEACON* earlier this year.

"That's something I have to accept. It's very intrusive but that's how it is."

There has been a deeply personal cost. For the past 15 years, the period he refers to as the "intense period" leading up to the settlement, he says he largely missed out on the life of his youngest son.

"I've been unable to give him a lot of time. I was unable to do that ... to do things that an ordinary dad might do, like support him at rugby or plays, and just being there to hang out with him. He's had to grow up by himself, really."

Most of his children harbour no ambition to enter iwi politics.

"They have seen the impact on me and it's unattractive to them."

But it was not always obvious that shepherding Tuhoe across the Treaty settlement line was to be what history is likely to record as his greatest achievement.

As a much younger man his prospects and goals were unremarkable. He worked in an Auckland car manufacturing plant for six months, hunted and trapped possums at Ruatahuna before migrating to Bluff and a role as a freezing works butcher.

He did some commercial fishing in the off season, worked at Nelson and Motueka on tobacco farms, picked fruit, and worked in forestry at places like Tuatapere.

Aged 19, he says he experienced the "underbelly" of New Zealand

The situations and people he encountered politicised him.

Ahead of the 1981 Springbok tour, he travelled back to Taneatua to enlist opposition to South Africa sending a racially-selected team to play in New Zealand.

"I went to a community meeting in someone's garage in McKenzie Street. I did my thing and when I finished one person got up and said to the others: 'All our lives we wish our children well, we send them to school so the whole Tuhoe nation can move on but here we have an example of failure. He's coming back with junk. Mr Chairman, I think we should excuse him and carry on with our business.'

"But two people supported me. They thanked me for showing the courage to come and talk to them."

"They said 'do not be discouraged, we're just not ready to be drawn into that whole politic'."

Thirty years ago he returned to his tribal area and began an apprenticeship that would last decades and equip him for his negotiator role.

He says he learned about the "Tuhoe character" in a conscious way ... by observation, by listening, by perception. He learned what works and what does not with his people.

He became the secretary of various marae committees, graduated to chairing them and school boards of trustees, and he moved into welfare, health and education.

Subsequent involvement in district organisations enabled him to look back at Tuhoe from outside, and to hear from others their opinion of Tuhoe people.

"From that beginning it became clear I had to be generous with time and opinion, and results ... it's the easiest thing to exact revenge against those who oppose one, but the greater thing is to be fair and just and generous, and you have to believe in what you're doing, you have to be part of setting the agenda and priorities, and you have to be in the middle of debates and arguments."

"You have to believe, and be generous with the outcomes as you do that. That's how one counters the discomfort people feel about change."

He says an example of generosity is Tuhoe's willingness to make available its new \$15 million Te Kura Whare complex at Taneatua for others to use, "while at the same time realising there's widespread impoverishment and sadness within Tuhoe families in the community and they need something good".

In spite of overwhelming euphoria when Te Kura Whare was opened, there are many who wonder what their dividend from it



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