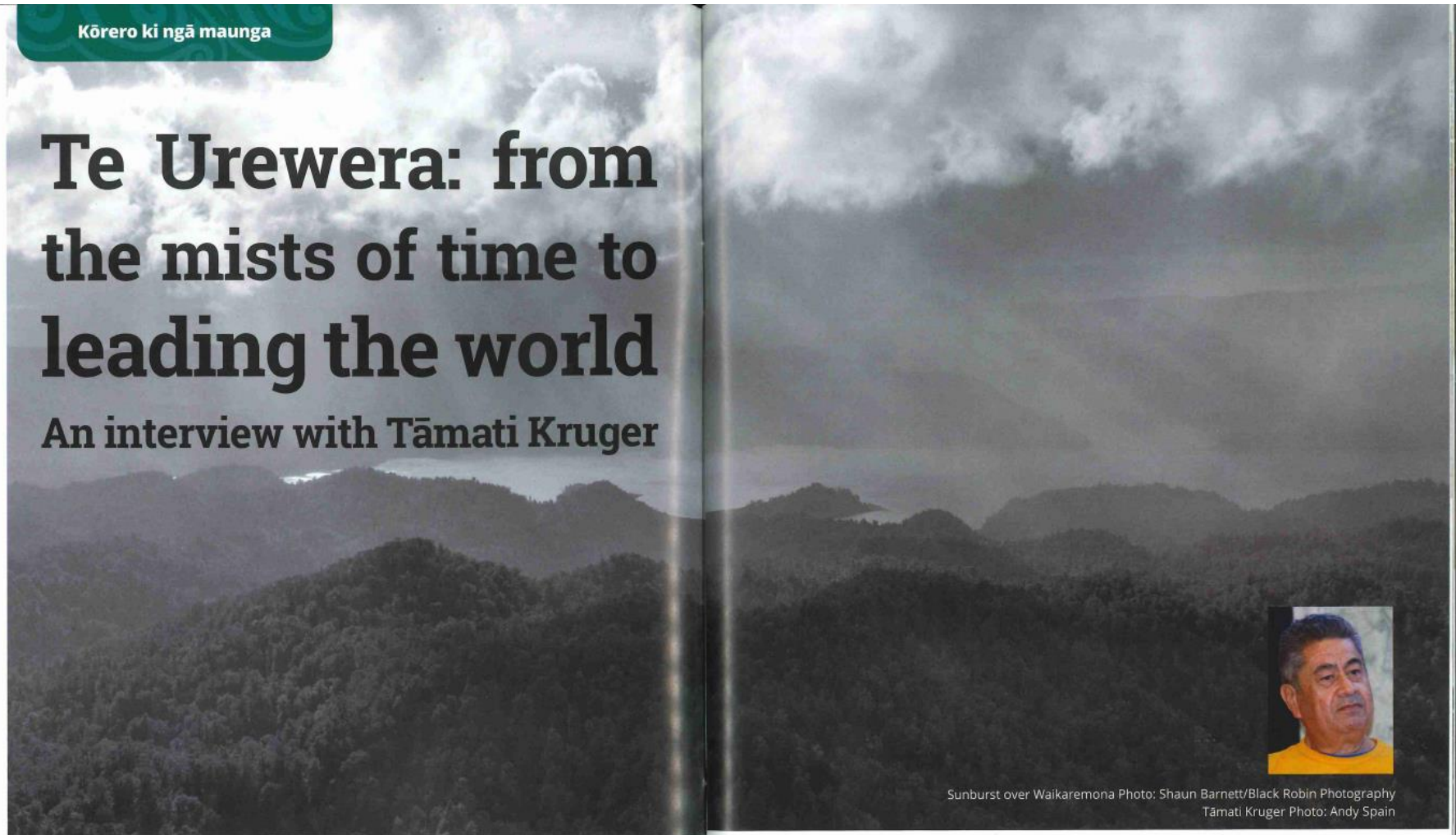


Te Urewera: from the mists of time to leading the world

An interview with Tāmāti Kruger



Sunburst over Waikaremoana Photo: Shaun Barnett/Black Robin Photography
Tāmāti Kruger Photo: Andy Spain

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The legal personification of Te Urewera represents a world first in land rights and management of natural places. Tāmāti Kruger, chairman of both Te Urewera Board and Tūhoe tribal authority, Te Uru Taumatua, says it calls for a bringing together of two

world views, a healing of past hurts, and re-learning for the Tūhoe people.

Above all, the new status recognises a relationship that's at one with nature, not ownership of an asset governed by rules and regulations. There is no precedent for

building the new Te Urewera, it's going to take time, and everyone is welcome on the journey, says Kruger.

To recap: The Te Urewera Act 2014 disestablished Te Urewera National Park and granted Te Urewera its own legal identity.

The new Te Urewera Board, comprising representatives from Tūhoe and the Crown, now speaks as its voice according to the principles of the Act. Setting out guidance for this is *Te Kawa o Te Urewera (Te Kawa)*, which was ratified by Tūhoe and the Crown



late last year following a public submission process to which FMC contributed.

The leadership of Kruger has been a key to achieving this settlement, also in transforming a once dysfunctional, disrespectful Tūhoe/Crown relationship to one of trust and goodwill.

So what does it all mean? Central to the Act is recognition that Te Urewera is and always has been the homeland of Tūhoe. Kruger explains the depth of the connection. 'Tūhoe are referred to as the Children of the Mist. That can be interpreted as, if you know where the mist comes from, if you know how long the mist has been cloaking the earth, then you know where Tūhoe come from.'

The Act rights past wrongs – war, confiscation and legislation – inflicted on Tūhoe and their homeland, he continues. 'Being given the status of national park in 1954 was the cruellest thing in that it caused the detachment of the Tūhoe people from that place. Over the years it took away their responsibilities and their connection with the land and their future; it caused them to be irrelevant in that the Crown now was governing and operating the whole place. One can even see in the brochures, over time the mention of Tūhoe got less, and then nothing. One could track the transition of Tūhoe being marginalised. So what this means now is that we are putting full effort into righting that wrong, and it doesn't happen overnight.'

Kruger says Tūhoe has signalled clearly that relationships, not only with the Crown but with all stakeholders and groups that have over generations been associated with Te Urewera, can now be repaired and improved.

And he says there are things for Tūhoe to re-learn. 'The kinship idea was taken over by ownership. Generations of Tūhoe now have to review what terms like tangata whenua mean, what being a kaitiaki means.'

For many Tūhoe the level of engagement in Te Urewera was reduced to cutting tracks

or painting huts, he adds. 'There was loss of high-level responsibility so the capabilities of fulfilling those governing roles all have to be relearned.'

Nevertheless Kruger looks ahead with positivity. 'We have created a new status of which we should be proud and share with the world, and that is that the land is a living person and we don't have to own it in order to live with it.'

For a long time people have thought themselves the masters of the environment, he says. 'So much of what is wrong with our environment has been brought about by that human attitude. We need to understand that people are not masters but simply components of the biodiversity of any place; components of nature. It's not something that will be fixed by legislation alone, but also by attitude and answering to a wiser set of principles. That's what *Te Kawa* is about.'

In the November 2017 *Backcountry*, FMC's Robin O'Neill wrote that *Te Kawa* is written with 'a love' not found in any other management plan. 'What we love about *Te Kawa* is that it so closely matches our own views of backcountry and manuhiri (visitors) recreating in the backcountry,' he wrote.

What's happened so far?

Kruger says Tūhoe and DOC have formed a good, trusting relationship and are now working through protocols and agreements, according to *Te Kawa*, to serve the needs of Te Urewera.

'We are slowly identifying, item by item, the expertise we need to go to for guidance with issues around protection, pest control, health and safety, flooding, fire, staff, tracks – all those practical things. The good news is we are figuring out that we need a new language between us, for example the DOC machinery needs new understandings around our ideas and concepts.'

While Tūhoe is keen to accept maximum responsibility for Te Urewera, Kruger recognises that many non-Tūhoe have a

lot to contribute in terms of experience, knowledge and expertise.

'It's about building a platform for that collaboration. So there's much to do, and I think in the process we are creating the blueprint for how other iwi work with Crown entities.' Funding for Te Urewera has been boosted through a new, shared model. 'Tūhoe and the Crown are now putting in equal funding and in the future Tūhoe will increase their contribution,' says Kruger. This is a notable improvement from the previous, Crown-only contribution, which had reportedly remained static for some years.

Te Kura Whenua, Paradise, a new visitor centre and base for Tūhoe te Mana Motuhake mai Waikaremoana, or Waikaremoana Tribal Authority, has been built on the Waikaremoa lake front. Kruger says the centre represents new beginnings and manifests the Tūhoe relationship with DOC.

Waikaremoana Holiday Park is getting a makeover too. The chalets have been upgraded and investment in improving other facilities will follow.

Existing concessions from the former national park are being honoured and rolled over until new 'Friendship Agreements' have been established, according to *Te Kawa*. Kruger says all parties are working on how to define and implement these.

He would like to see both a wider focus for the new agreements, and engagement with interest groups, for example FMC, as well as commercial operators.

'Conventional concessionaire relationships focus on a specific, narrow role. Boating concessions, for example, are about just boating things; moorings, wharves and maritime rules. For fishing people it's just been about trout habitat. Tūhoe is saying, can you people look Te Urewera-wide; have a relationship with all things that surround the water. Everything is part of whenua (the land), why not engage more widely in other experiences, education and promotion, and that would be my message

to the FMC people. What we would like to do as we go forward is formulate some form of Friendship Agreement with FMC, and we would like to invite them to have a look at all of Te Urewera, that their role is not too narrow and focused.'

Kruger says the inaugural Te Urewera Board worked well together and a new board, moving to a composition of six Tūhoe-appointed and three Crown-appointed members (previously it was four/four), is expected to be confirmed in May.

'My personal view is Te Urewera needs stable leadership and direction, so that we can successfully project to the New Zealand public, and to the world, the idea that nature and humanity should be regarded as a kinship tie, not an owner/asset relationship. And that our culture, our identity and sense of belonging is connected with the land.'

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The successful collaboration between DOC and Tūhoe, developed during the implementation of Te Urewera Act 2014, was acknowledged in last year's Institute of Public Administration New Zealand (IPANZ) Public Sector Awards. DOC and Tūhoe jointly took out the Excellence in Crown-Māori Relationships Award and the supreme Prime Minister's Award for Public Sector Excellence. The achievement was about overcoming more than a century of fractious relations that took time, huge courage and letting go from both sides, says Tamati Kruger.

DOC Deputy Director General, Mervyn English, says when you look at the history of Tūhoe and how they were treated it's worse than embarrassing. 'Now we're finding a way for them to step out of that. What greater thing can you be involved in than people finding their own place in the world?'

'The other thing is you get a sense of nation building – this is all about New Zealanders coming together and in a much more reasonable way.'

