

New Beaumont Bridge cultural and design elements



Beaumont Bridge

The new Beaumont Bridge has been designed within a co-design process with mana whenua led by the Mana Ahurea team at Aukaha. The bridge features design and artworks by Kāi Tahu artists Emma Kitson, Neil Pardington and Keri Whaitiri.

First and foremost, the bridge design ensures physical safety. Additionally, artistic design detailing reveals layers of meaning that relate to mana whenua associations with this place.

The bridge takes its primary inspiration from the waka huia as a vessel of great importance. Integrated cultural art and design components conceptually transform the bridge into a large-scale 'waka huia', with patterning and articulated form that acknowledges the special status of those who cross this span of the awa, while ensuring their safety and protection.

Waka Huia

A waka huia is a container made to hold precious items or treasure. Usually the contents of a waka huia would be adornments for the body like jewellery or feathers.

In 1933 a rare waka huia was found near here at Beaumont station. This wooden box was tapa lined and contained some 70 huia feathers, bundles of scarlet kākā feathers and a tapa wrapped wooden awl.

Mystery surrounds the identity of the original owner of this taoka, however this area and the river itself are traditional inland pathways used by southern Māori.

Today Beaumont Bridge carries the legacy and whakapapa of this traditional taoka.



Kōhai

The downstream bridge barrier is reminiscent of the bell-like drooping flowers of the kōwhai tree. Here they are adapted into faceted metal panels with a glowing gold finish. The barrier appearance is intended to vary with sun movement over the course of a day, as well as climatically and seasonally. This recalls the maramataka (Māori lunar calendar), an integral part of the lives of Kāi Tahu whānui.

Kōhai is the placename for a traditional Kāi Tahu Nohoaka (camp) located close to this area of the river.

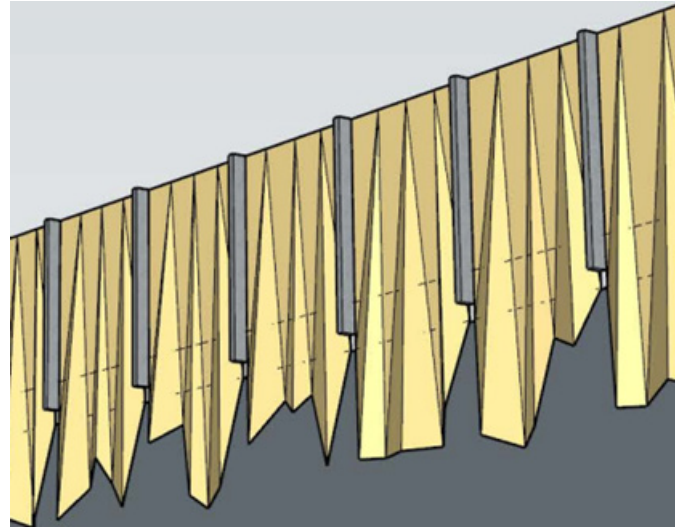
Kōhai (alternative spelling for Kōwhai-Sophora microphylla) is a listed taoka species. You'll see these tree's adorned with hanging clusters of yellow flowers in early spring.

Flowering kōhai carries the message that the warmer time of the year is on the way and alerts people to prepare for the associated māhika kai (food gathering) practices for this time of year.

Bark gathered from the sunny side of the tree steeped in water was used as rokoā (medicine) to heal a wide range of ailments.



Image by John Kulemans (1842-1912) supplied courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library



Kōhai inspired bridge siding panels by Keri Whaitiri

Mata-au (Clutha River)

The upstream concrete barrier carries patterned impressions by Emma Kitson (Kāi Tahu) of the flowing waters of the awa. Also on this side, 'MATA-AU' inscribed large in the contemporary Kāi Tahu font-Raranga by Neil Pardington (Kāi Tahu), clearly acknowledges the traditional name for the river.

The name Mata-au comes from Kāi Tahu whakapapa and traces the genealogy of water itself.

Kāi Tahu have intimate knowledge of navigating the Mata-au, river routes, safe harbours and landing places. Urupā (burial grounds) and battlegrounds are located all along this river.

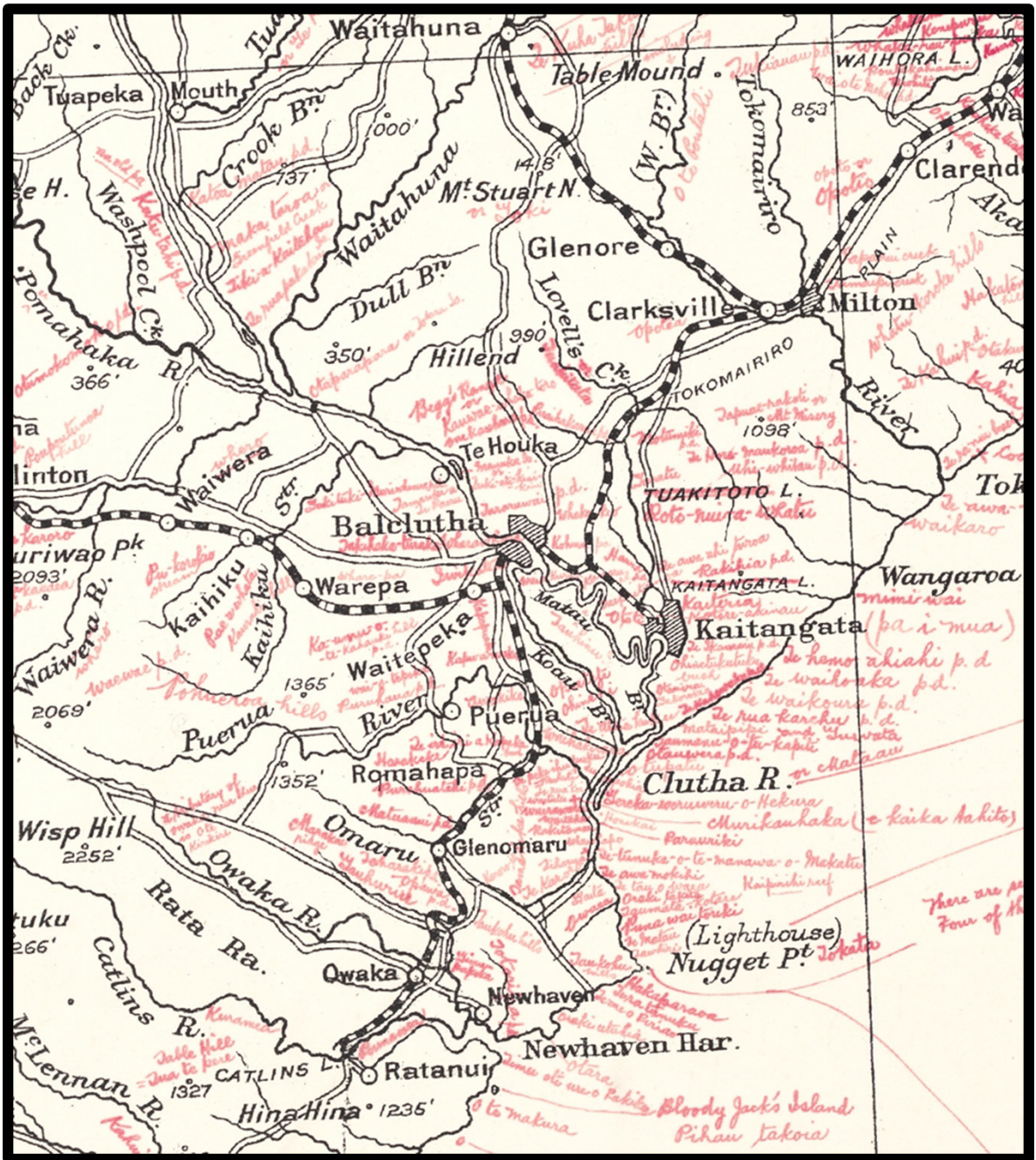
The Mata-au was an integral part in a vast network of trails used by Kāi Tahu leading to inland resources, places for camping and gathering kai.

The Mata-au was an important route for transporting pounamu from inland to coastal settlements, where it was traded north and south.

Knowledge of the river continues to be held by Kāi Tahu whānui and is regarded as a taoka.



Bridge siding featuring artwork by Emma Kitson and Neil Pardington



This map was overlaid with traditional Māori placenames for the Clutha Valley area and reveals something of the rich and layered knowledge of Kāi Tahu whānui in this area. Collected by Herries Beattie, 1920.

Ika artwork

This lively representation by Kāi Tahu artist Emma Kitson on the under bridge abutments celebrates local fresh water fish and the significance of these species to Kāi Tahu people and culture.

Māhika kai (resource gathering) is a central concept of Kāi Tahu culture-it binds Kāi Tahu whānui to ancestral practices and specific knowledge of land and waterways.

Tuna (Eel)

Tuna are of chiefly importance to all Māori. Their former abundance in waterways ensured they were a staple food throughout Aotearoa. Prominent in myth and legend, stories of tuna have travelled alongside Polynesian people from Hawaiiiki.

Kanakana (Lamprey)

Kanakana are one of the most ancient fish on earth. They are present in fossil records dating back 450 million years-older than dinosaurs!

Kōkopu (Galaxias)

Kōkopu are native fish. Their genus Galaxias was coined for their glittery, starlike markings. They like to hide in shadows beneath overhanging plants and rocks.

Inaka (Whitebait)

Like all our precious freshwater fish species inaka are now in population decline due to agricultural water use and pollution, deforestation, invasive species and overfishing.

Kārara-Mokomoko

NZ Schist Gecko, McCanns Skink and the Southern Grass Skink were found in a study of this area before the new bridge was built. During works the lizard populations were 'relocated' nearby. Special plantings surround the new bridge, including new habitat for these special residents.



McCanns skink



Southern grass skink



Schist gecko

References

Ngāi Tahu Māhika Kai series: <https://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/culture/mahinga-kai/>

Te Karaka-Issue 85: https://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/our_stories/protecting-our-taonga-tk85/

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NZ Herpetological Society: <https://www.reptiles.org.nz/>