

The Maori Story of Kupe and Te Wheke

as told by Michael Elkington

A long time ago in far away Hawaiki, a Tohunga (a magic man) named Muturangi, sat brooding, thinking of his revenge upon the villagers who had banished him to the far and lonely side of the island.



Muturangi was by the water one day when he came across a wheke (an octopus) feeding in the shallows.



Using his powers, he charmed the creature and became its master. Muturangi would send Te Wheke out to catch fish to bring back for him to eat.



One day he had an idea.

Go to where the villagers set their fishing nets and take the fish that are caught in them. It will be easier than having to catch the fish yourself.



Even with plenty of food, and revenge on the villagers, Muturangi was still unhappy and continued to brood.



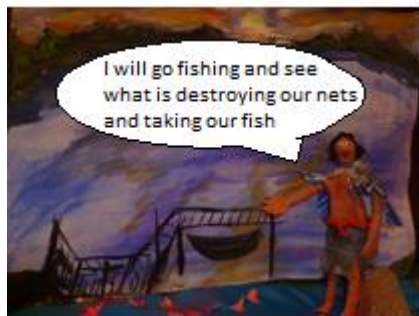
The fishermen returned to the village without any fish at all, but worse, the nets had all been damaged and some were now useless beyond repair.

"Who is taking our fish?" cried one fisherman, "my net, it's ruined" said another.



The fishermen were confused so they went to find Kupe, a respected Maori warrior to ask him what it meant.

"I will go fishing, and see what is destroying our nets and taking our fish" said Kupe.



Travelling in his Waka (canoe), Kupe was upon the fishing grounds as te Ra (the sun) slowly rose to start his new journey.

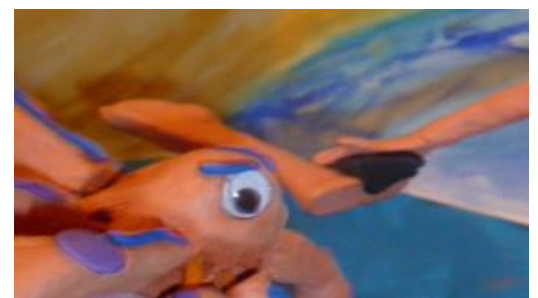
Setting his net, Kupe lay in wait. Only a short time had passed when he noticed a disturbance in the water. Slowly, he became aware of the presence of magic.



Muturangi! He was using the Wheke to wreck the villagers nets and feed himself!



Kupe struck Te Wheke with his Taiaha (a long club) and a great battle followed. Kupe was very strong and as fast as the fastest wind. His fighting skill was famous, but Te Wheke had eight arms and was also quick.



On they fought, striking, blocking and spinning out of the way, again and again. Sometimes the eye was unable to track what was happening.

This great struggle moved across Te Moana Nui a Kiwa, the great ocean of Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean).



Kupe managed to bring Te Wheke to Te Tau Ihu (the Northern part of the South Island) and with greater effort began to land more blows against it.



Great hollows were carved out of the land. The sea rushed into these during the titanic struggle, until Te Wheke began to weaken and tire.



Realising his doom, Te Wheke became more and more desperate to get away. The motion of his many arms backing away caused great boulders to be churned up in a long line.



Kupe could sense victory. Leaping into the air, he brought down all his weight and delivered the mortal blow with such force that Te Wheke was killed outright, splitting him into two.



When Te Wheke was split his eyes landed in other parts of the Te Tau Ihu region. When they landed they turned to rock.

One of the rocks is next to Arapawa Island in the Tori Channel. It is said to be bad luck to gaze upon the "eye of the octopus" if you are a first time traveller on the Raukawa Moana (the Cook Strait).



The other eye landed at Ngawhatu, a small valley at the back of Stoke.



The full name of the valley is Nga Whatu o Te Wheke o Mutorangi (The Eyes of The Octopus Of Mutorangi).



Both rocks/eyes have been studied and neither are geologically matching their surroundings. Their composition is not natural to the areas they are in. Today, the hollows that were carved in the land by Te Wheke are named the Marlborough Sounds, and the churned up boulders were how the Nelson Boulder Banks were formed. The Ngawhatu valley (located behind Stoke, Nelson) was named due to the hills that were formed by the body of Te Wheke being split in two.

