

## The Cultural Landscape 101

An overview of the cultural landscape of the Styx River.

- including the ways in which the culture has determined the landscape and the ways in which landscape has impacted on the culture.

2001-05-18

#1000812

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- boat shed on the river -

## Puharekekenui – the Styx River

Beside the Waimakiriri River, travelling a 28-kilometre path from its source to the sea, flows Puharekekenui, the Styx River. This wonderful waterway clings to the edge of the city of Christchurch and experiences both urban and rural environs. The city of Christchurch is situated on the flat coastal plains of the province of Canterbury, in the South Island of New Zealand. Over time a river carries sediments and nutrients from the surrounding lands and deposits them in chronological layers along its course. I am investigating the layers of culture, and human settlements, and the marks in the landscape of the river today which hint at the past roles she played, and the different visions that people have had of the waterway. I discuss the bio-physical, ecological, socio-economic, Maori, and European forces which influenced the landscape of the river. This leads to an in-depth discussion of some of the contemporary issues and interactions of these different forces in the landscape.

This process is important in making the landscape more legible and for developing a richer appreciation of what is around us as we walk down the river "...with the past expressed or known, it is part of the landscape experienced" (Di Lucas, in the Pigeon Bay marine farm evidence – cited by Bowring pers. Comm. 1.5.2001). Imagining the landscape as text means that we need to be able to read what is there before our eyes. And as with the writing in a book we require prior knowledge to be able to understand what is being told, otherwise you just see a whole series of marks upon the page. So it is with the landscape of the Styx River. As I investigate the area the sequence of marks and landforms have taken on new meaning.

At times it is helpful to imagine looking through someone else's eyes to see what they have seen, as the views are different depending on your perspective. To a bird high in the sky the Styx is like a sinuous eel in the grass. So let us put things into perspective by looking through the eyes of a hawk flying over. This map illustrates the topography of the Styx and shows the names of some places that can be met on a journey down the river. Starting near Marshlands Road we encounter Nga Pakanga Tuahu. A pakanga is a battle, and a tuahu is a sacred stone or stick to mark a place (Jacky Tonkin) – in this case to mark the graves of those fallen in battle. The exact location of this grave is the subject of a 'silent file' so that no one can go digging, however I now look with new respect in my eyes at the mounds in what were previously plain looking paddocks. Te Rau Aruhe may refer to the aruhue, which is an edible

Diagram S.

map: sourced from Waimarī County plan.



fern root and rau, which can mean gather. Further down river is Te Rau Karamu – to gather karamu – the karamu is a red skinned variety of potato. This place is near to present day Spencerville, which along with Brooklands is where the European settlers made their first villages and homesteads.

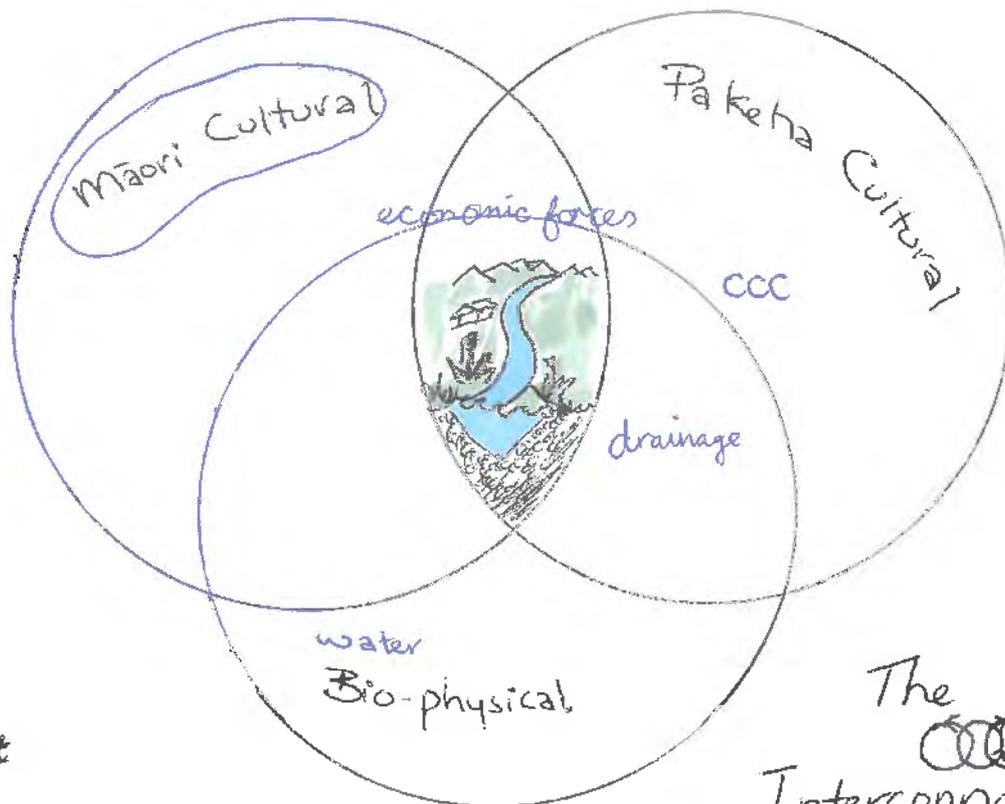
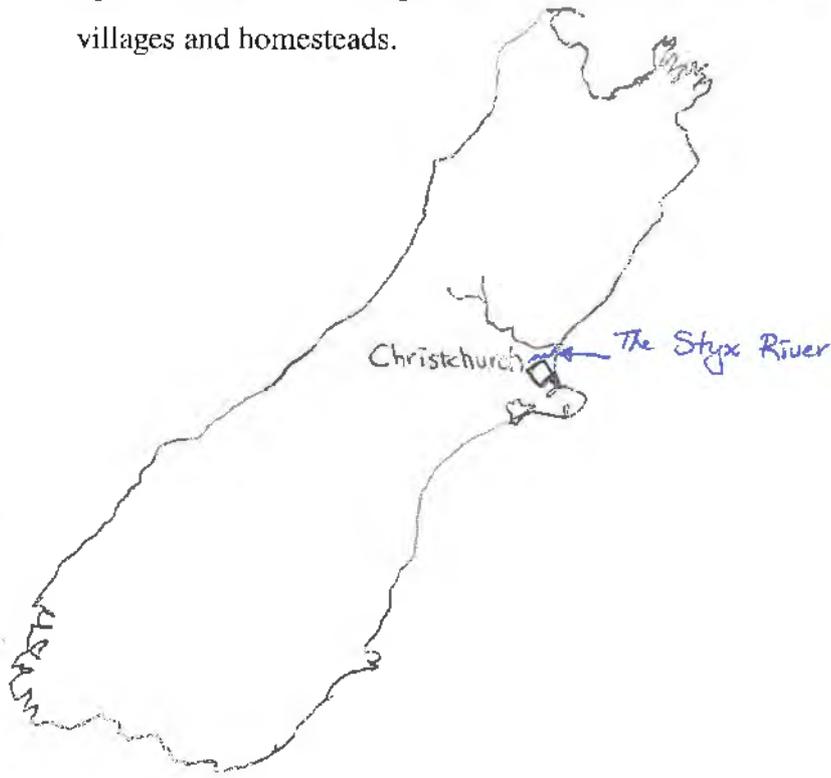


diagram to  
layers in the  
landscape -

The Three  
Interconnected  
Systems

## The Biophysical Environment

As diagram s. illustrates the Styx is a serpentine creature and it wriggles across the plains from North-West Christchurch to its meeting with the Brooklands lagoon and then the sea. The Styx River today reflects an earlier location of the Waimakariri River as it cut its way across the Canterbury plains. The name Waimakariri means 'cold rushing water' (Moody D, pers. Comm. 1998) and the course of the river has changed many times - the river once flowed out into the Pacific South of Banks Peninsula. All this rushing about has accumulated the great outwash fan of gravel that the City of Christchurch is built on. This gravel has water flowing beneath it which is clear and cold, and this is the source of the springs of Puharakekenui. A base level of H<sub>2</sub>O lies in aquifers within the porous gravel, sandwiched between two layers of water-tight clay. At certain points along the rivers course this cool water bubbles upwards into the bed of the stream and increases the flow. The Styx meanders seawards through residential developments, horticultural areas, reserves and rural pastures in that order as the water moves downstream on its way to the salt marshes which mark its meeting with the ocean.

Ultimately all is change and moves on. The Ancient Greek philosopher Heroclitus found comfort in change and said that you cannot step into the same river twice for the waters are continually changing and flowing away. (Martin, 1998). This is certainly the case with the Styx River.

## The Maori Cultural Landscape

Maori people lived and worked in the Canterbury area long before the tall ships of the settlers arrived, and the cultural landscape of the Maori is older and somewhat hidden compared to the European one. In this essay I hope I can bring to light a little of what this place means to Maori.

Maori, the first people of Aotearoa came to these shores from successive waves of migration between 1200 and 800 years ago. (Karaitiana, Couling and Watts 1999). These groups were formed into tribes based on the waka which each group arrived in and later on the shared blood of families and alliances. These tribes or Iwi went on to take up different parts of the country and set up communities there. Canterbury is in the rohe or area of the Ngai Tahu Iwi.

This is a group comprised of the people of the Waitaha, Ngati Mamoe and Ngai Tahu tribes (Tau, p.19 unpublished). The most powerful alliance was formed I believe around the fortified pa at Kaiapoi. The people lived and worked throughout Tuahuriri (Canterbury) including on the river of Puharakekenui. Kainga, the smaller homes of whanau (families) were established along the lower reaches of the river. Those areas closer to the sea were favoured for mahinga kai (food gathering) and people caught tuna (eels), inanga (whitebait) as well as a tasty harvest of other species, (Karaitiana, pers. Comm. 14.5.2001. Each whanau group had a turanga waka, that is an area where they were allowed to gather kai (food) and other resources. Today there is a section of land which is owned by Maori and leased to the Crown as a reserve, this is down on the Brooklands lagoon very near to the final few kilometres of the river. The inheritors of this land are the tangata whenua, i.e the descendents of the original Maori tribespeople. With some of them also sits the responsibility of kaitiakitanga, or guardianship. Over time Maori developed a relationship with their environment that included a code of values for the sustainable management of the land and water resources on which their survival depended. The kaitiaki were responsible for guarding a resource or treasure for future generations (see Durie, 1998, p.23). Today this is still true, and many Canterbury Maori would like to see a tai piri, or temporary restriction on fishing placed on the lower Styx River so that the numbers of tuna can regenerate, ( Nigel Harris, pers. Comm 5.2001).

#### Placenames:

Choosing placenames is not so much about recognising what is there as it is about deciding how we would like to see a place. Thus we have some power over how the cultural environment is to be constructed. The Maori people decided to name the places they encountered after the important events of their tribes and thus encoded meaning and history in the landscape. Pakcha chose names like Styx for slightly different reasons. One of the most plausible and well researched stories which I have heard for the naming of the Styx is that there was a crossing point where the ground was firmer where the old main North-South Maori trail traversed the swamps of the Styx heading into what is now Christchurch. Some sticks pushed into the earth marked this place, and it became known as 'the sticks'. Indeed on an early map of the river the spelling is reported to appear thus. In time the name was changed to the classical spelling after the Greek mythology. This was related to me by Mr Denis Hills, the president of the Styx History Group and City Councillor. It is interesting to continue to

investigate this new name. The mythology originates from the classical period of Greek civilisation. The souls of the departed journeyed to Hades' realm, the underworld. The river which they had to cross was the Styx. A ferryman waited to take them across and he had to be paid with money. Thus the dead were buried with a coin in their mouth so that they would be able to pay in the afterlife. The Styx was thus a river of mystery, dividing the worlds of the living and the dead. The current Maori name for the river refers to bodies lain with a flax bush, and the upstream waters of Puharakekenui were traditionally used by Maori in the embalming process, for washing the dead. Thus the association is an appropriate one.

Puharakekenui is explained as referring to an incident that occurred up near Wellington after an inter-tribal battle. These were quite common in the 1500's and 1600's, perhaps even right back to the 1300's (Karaitiana, pers. Comm. 14.5.2001). Harakeke is one of the two species of New Zealand flax, *Phormium tenax*, (Christchurch City Council, 2001) . and pu means lain. The name came about as a leader named Maru went to the harakeke bush where the bodies of two fallen Ngai Tahu chiefs were lain. The telling of stories is very important to the Maori because their culture was always an oral one – the means of transmitting history was through song and chants, the spoken word not the written word. A story should be retold correctly, by one who knows it well in order to maintain its integrity. Thus I have here the story of how the place –name Puharakeke came about, in Tau's original text.

### **Te Maire Tau – from a chapter entitled Pikituroa, the longstanding plumes of Ngai Tahu - in an unpublished manuscript**

The Ngai Tahu leaders knew that Ngati Kahungunu would attack and preparations were made to leave for the South Island as Ngati Kahungunu were too powerful for Ngai Tahu to resist. However Maru, a senior head of the tribe went to the Ngati Kahungunu Pa to fetch his wives who were from that tribe. During his visit Maru saw the Ngati Kahungunu preparing for war and also managed to see weakness in their methods. Maru returned with his wives to his people and prepared for war satisfied that he knew the Ngati Kahungunu defects. As soon as Maru had returned to his kainga, Ngati Kahungunu were closing in on Ngati Kurii. A naval and land battle was fought at **Waiwhetu** which is a stream near Petone. Ngati Kurii won. After the battle, the Ngati Kurii people were preparing to eat the Ngati Kahungunu who had been killed. Maru looked to his father and brother in laws of Ngati Kahungunu who were captured but had not taken part in the battle. Maru went to the flax bush (harakeke) where two Ngai Tahu leaders of high rank were lain (pu) and gave the bodies to his in-laws with the

words, "E kai koe ia a au, kua kai hoki au i a koe".<sup>1</sup> Maru's message was "You eat me and I will eat you", meaning that Maru's inlaws were to eat the two Ngai Tahu chiefs as well. The names of these two chiefs were Kahumataroa and Marcinaka who were the children of Tahumataa, making them senior rangatira of Ngai Tahu. This incident was known as Puharakeketapu. Maru's decision was deeply resented by Waitai, an uncle who withdrew his followers from under Maru's leadership and migrated to the South Island where he was killed by the Ngati Mamoe at Waihopae (Invercargill). While Maru's act is puzzling it was also a masterful way to salvage his whanau's mana. O'Regan argues that Maru in effect saved the lives of his inlaws as no one would dare eat the two Ngati Kahungunu chiefs as they would be virtually eating their relations. On a more selfish level Maru was also safeguarding the mana of his children. If his father and brother in laws had been eaten, this act could have been cast up at Maru's children as a 'kii mokai', an insult. The names Puharakeketapu and Waiwhetu are remembered today in Christchurch with Puharakeke at the mouth of the Waimakariri River and Waiwhetu as a tributary running off the Avon River near Ilam.



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<sup>1</sup>. The names of the chiefs were Kahumataroa and Marainaka. They were from both Ngai Tuhaitara and Ngati Kurii.

## The European story

The biophysical environment was extensively modified by European modification and past Drainage Board practices. However the values and attitudes which shaped the Styx River have their roots in sensible thinking. For “in the late 1800’s Christchurch had the highest level of mortality of any New Zealand centre. Most deaths were due to the water borne diseases of typhoid, diphtheria and dysentery” (Watts and Greenway, 1999). Also, with its flat topography flooding became a serious problem for the growing city. The Christchurch Drainage Board, managed the city’s waterways from 1875 until 1989 and had, state Watts and Greenway, a very clear focus for waterways management – to drain the city of surface waters. The ways to achieve this on the Styx included the straightening out of the waterway to make it more efficient at channelling away this water to the sea. This is particularly evident on the lower reaches of the Styx around Spencerville. Along with the draining of most of its wetland margins. The native flora and fauna have often suffered as their habitat has been reduced, and introduced species compete for food and act as predators. When European settlers came to the Styx area it was to graze animals. One of the first stations established in this area was the ‘Sandhill’s Run’ which was down where the Burwood plantation is today, East and South of Spencerville (Surgenor, 2000).



- the view of Janet Stewart Reserve from the new jetty built by the CCC-

Today in the European cultural sphere we have the local government body, the Christchurch City Council. There is a great need for assistance if the Styx is to be a high quality wetland environment. To promote sustainable land use, environmentally sensitive development and responsible harvesting practices. There are many waterways and wetlands in and around Christchurch. The Christchurch City Council Water Services unit runs a Waterways and wetlands enhancement program. This program is a partnership between the CCC and the local communities – with the aim of protecting the health of our waterways and restoring their natural processes. The jurisdiction for the management and responsibility for the maintenance of the Styx falls on the Christchurch City Council (CCC) and the Canterbury Regional Council jointly.

The values of the Tangata Whenua are strongly supported in this multi- cultural vision for the future of the Styx river. These include preserving the 'Mauri' or life essence of Puharkekenui, maintaining healthy eel populations and preserving habitat for spawning inanga. Harakeke is a very valuable plant for weaving traditional Maori items. There is a group of weavers and craftspeople called Te Korari who are working in partnership with the Christchurch City Council to ensure that the weaving varieties are not lost and a flax resource is available now

and in the future. Recently a number of pa harakeke have been established in reserves around the city to further this project. The interest in the river and concern about its present state and the potential for improvement is attested to by "The Guardians of the Styx inc." a community based environmental group. They aim to raise awareness of the river, and act as a lobby group to return the Styx to a more desirable state from a recreational, environmental and aesthetic point of view. Recently this group has been awarded a \$20,000 grant to continue lobbying and advocating on issues (Oldham, pers. Comm. 2001).

### The Interconnectedness of all the Layers

The biophysical environment is strongly related to the cultural environment. The characteristics of Puharakekenui invited different sorts of cultural activity in the past and just as today these activities affect and continue to change the waterway. As diagram t. illustrates, there are many different dimensions to this resource issue. The Styx River is a place of great importance to people and wildlife alike. It is a part of our biophysical heritage and an area where great changes are afoot. As the city limits expand, there is increasing pressure on the area in many different ways. There is pressure economically for the farmers to sell their land, sub-dividing and making money. This is encouraged by some factors in the sociocultural sphere. The land is being rezoned as residential by the CCC which allows this to happen. The farming lifestyle is no longer seen as profitable, and the issue is increasingly complicated as many of these farmers are reaching an age when they want to retire and their children are no longer interested in farming, a cultural shift (McMath, pers. Comm. 1999).

These changes are in turn governed by other cultural institutions and policies. When the land is subdivided it gets sold to real estate agents who cover it in new residential housing developments. If these are under four hectares section 58 of the Resource Management Act stipulates that they must set aside a riparian strip along the river margin. So sometimes the sections of land will be just over 4 ha in size! (Kemp, pers. Comm. 1998). This will hinder the fisherpeoples access to the river, as in some cases there is very little public access. Then the Fish and Game Council will be called in to try and arrange an alternative access strategy. If there are any fish left to catch that is. This development can have considerable impacts in the biophysical sphere. There is increased runoff of rainwater into the river because of all the roofs and paved areas. Over the last seven years this is believed to have almost doubled the peak flows of the river during floods (Knox, J pers. Comm. 2000). This water invariably

contains high sediment loads, and when these are deposited on the bed of the river they have very negative effects on the fish and insect life. Economic forces drive most of what happens in the Styx but to varying degrees. Today the expansion of Christchurch City, driven by a growing population and economic speculation leads to the development of more residential housing and the subdivisions of the dairy farms and market gardens of old.

The CCC has a mixed perspective on the Styx. On the one side they are here to protect the natural environment but on the other they want to maximise the economic growth for the city. They must develop effective plans and policy to balance the different values of the Styx River. Today culture, heritage, recreation, ecological, landscape and drainage values are all considered (Heremaia, pers. Comm. 2001). This is a significant shift in the focus of the governing body.



- willow trees reflected in the full river -

To facilitate all of these goals the CCC has undertaken a significant investigation into the Styx River area. Over several years they have commissioned a thorough, multi-disciplinary study. This includes the areas physical qualities, its hydrology, landscape values, fisheries drainage and residential potential. This has led into the cultural, recreational and spiritual

beliefs and practices of the community, which have been investigated by extensive community consultation and focussed discussion groups. Many scientific reports have been collected on the environmental and biological values of the Styx ecosystem.

### Final Analysis

Synthesising all these layers together into a holistic understanding of the Styx will not be easy, and implementing a successful strategy harder still. To this end the CCC have completed a draft asset management plan, which includes visions for what the Styx will be like in forty years time, and I look forward to seeing these become reality.

Thinking the layers builds a richer appreciation of the cultural landscape. The river has been encountered by two peoples, each for the first time. Change in our societies has redefined her role and gifted us all a new way of looking at the water; together in partnership. Learning the connections between the different layers leads to a greater appreciation of how actions in one sphere affect all the others. If we believe different things about the Styx then we will act differently towards her. Ultimately all is change and like the water we must all move on. Perhaps we may not find comfort in change like Heraclitus but that said it is still true that you cannot step into the same river twice for the waters are continually changing and flowing away. None of the changes to the Styx have completely destroyed her. The essential qualities still remain. There is water, and this is something that sadly cannot be said for all rivers today, and there are fish – tūna, trout and whitebait. Nothing could make the Styx not the place where I was born and the turanga waiwai – the place where I have the right to speak.

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Photos: the authors own

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