



Matiaha Tiramorehu was a revered Ngai Tahu Chief who lived during the 19th century and now lies buried in the Old Maori urupa, Kawa situated on the Moeraki peninsula. Tiramorehu was born at Kaiapoi Pa around the turn of the century and died on the 7th April, 1881. During his lifetime Tiramorehu became a respected leader, playing a large part in the later history of his people. After Kaiapoi Pa was sacked by Ngati Toa in 1831, Tiramorehu joined the retaliatory raiding parties of Ngai Tahu fighting alongside his father Karaki, and, it has been said, Tiramorehu was wounded during these raids.

In 1837 after peace had been established with Ngati Toa, Tiramorehu led a migration of Ngai Tahu people south via a flotilla of canoes, eventually settling at Moeraki. In 1848 Tiramorehu was involved in the purchases made by H. T. Kemp on behalf of the Crown. After the Crown reneged on their promises Tiramorehu took a leading role in seeking redress from the Crown and thus 'Te Kereme' the Ngai Tahu claim was born. Wesleyan missionary James Watkin visited Moeraki in 1844 and commented that Tiramorehu was '*perhaps better acquainted with genealogical antiquities than any other person*' - a reference to the vast knowledge of traditional lore that Tiramorehu possessed.

Until 1868 Tiramorehu conducted a Wharekura, Omanawharetapu at Moeraki, teaching young Maori children the traditional knowledge and customs that had been handed down through the generations. This wharekura was conducted at Kawa urupa, where Tiramorehu now lies.

Tiramorehu died at Moeraki on 7th April 1881, at, it was said, over 80 years of age. His wife Pirihiira had passed away several years earlier, but they left no direct descendants. His tangi occupied a week and drew over 500 mourners. Tiramorehu has the distinct honour of being commemorated in stained glass in the Kotahitanga church that once stood watch over Kawa urupa but has since been relocated and refurbished, and now sits above the main road in to Moeraki. The stained glass window was crafted in England in the 1800's at a cost of over £300.

Sometime after his death, it has been said, Tiramorehu's grave was desecrated by grave robbers looking for greenstone taonga buried with him. A Moeraki Kaumatua said that he was present as a little boy when the discovery was made. He stated that the top had been cut in half and pulled apart leaving the coffin exposed. The validity of this story is unknown, and although highly improbable, the top of his stone coffin is clearly in two separate pieces. There also exists a story that connects Tiramorehu's tangi and the salt water springs and creeks surrounding Moeraki. It was said that Tiramorehu had a pet Whale named Karaki after his father. Now Karaki was a close friend and mentor to Tiramorehu and upon his death it was said that the people of Moeraki, in their grief, forgot to inform Karaki of Tiramorehus' passing. When word reached Karaki he became furious at the negligence and decided to punish the people of Moeraki. He and several companions swam into the bay that lies adjacent to Kawa on the day of Tiramorehus' tangi. In one great splash of several large whales' tales the entire Moeraki peninsula was drenched in salt water, thus were all the springs and creeks in Moeraki, except one, made brackish. Karaki left this single spring to sustain the Maori who lived in Moeraki. Although Tiramorehu passed away more than 120 years ago and left no direct descendants, his grave is visited frequently by the whanau of Moeraki, a testament to the respect earned by the actions of a beloved leader.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from information supplied by Haydon Richards, a member of the Moeraki Runanga.