

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 67: We Hongry. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as... If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we spent a whopping seven episodes talking all about Māori fishing techniques, which has been our largest topic to date! Never quite expected that it would be food and fishing that I found the most information on so far but I'd rather have too much info than not enough. This episode we are going to launch into our next series which in contrast is going to be much shorter, mostly just cause I couldn't find as much information on it. Since we spent so long talking about how Māori got food out of the sea or out of the ground it would only be appropriate to discuss how they actually went about cooking it into a delicious meal. This episode(s) will also have a bit of info that I wasn't able to squeeze into the previous topics so it also serves as a bit of addendum to those episodes too. We have talked about this a little over the course of our journey but I want to dedicate a bit of time specifically to it. However, we can't just dive into how these foods were cooked, like in the past we need to go back to East Polynesia to talk a bit about what Māori were doing with their food and culinary practices before arriving in Aotearoa. And just as a prenote, I will be referring to pre-Aotearoa, East Polynesian peoples as 'Māori'. Just know that that isn't what they would have called themselves and their culture was much more Polynesian than it was to Māori culture that we have been discussing in the previous episodes. I'm just using it to refer to the group of people that would eventually become Māori for simplicity.

As you might expect, Māori in Polynesia had a much different culinary culture to that of Māori by the time of Abel Tasman's sort-of-arrival in 1642, mostly due to the fact that the foods available to them were much different. Plants like breadfruit, coconut and banana were all staples in the East Polynesian diet and in fact were brought from other islands in Polynesia much in the same way that they would be taken to New Zealand later in the 13th century. There was also cabbage tree, specifically tī pore, which you can learn more about in episode 52 where we discussed tī at length, as well as other fruit and nut trees. In fact these trees were planted all over the place, from gardens to the edges of villages or even just simply wherever there was good soil, including just in the middle of the village itself! When Europeans arrived in the Pacific some time later this apparently caused them to think that the settlements were forested and that the indigenous peoples just hadn't cut down all the trees when they had put houses up in those areas. Which was rather the opposite as those trees had in fact been placed there on purpose to be a food source. In addition to these there was the kumara, taro and yam, which we discussed at length in episode 50 and a whole bunch of other episodes too. In terms of domesticated animals, Polynesians mostly had pigs, dogs and chickens, all three of which were eaten for their protein but other than that, livestock wasn't really a thing in Polynesia same as it wasn't either in pre-European New Zealand. In fact, we don't see any evidence that pigs or chickens made it to Aotearoa during the Great Migration despite remains from both animals being found on islands in south east Polynesia, so perhaps early Māori just found them too much of a hassle to transport. Interestingly, Polynesians didn't actually fence their pigs into a pen, instead allowing them to roam around and forage at their leisure while fencing the gardens off to ensure the pigs didn't get into them. Rats were also eaten on occasion, though they obviously didn't bring them to the islands of Polynesia or Aotearoa on purpose and seabirds, fruit bats and kaimoana were all the menu too. During periods where cultivated and hunted food supplies couldn't be eaten, for example after a cyclone destroys reefs and gardens, Polynesians would go to look for wild food sources that needed a little bit of processing to make edible. This would become extremely important for Māori when they made it to Aotearoa.

It's all well and good to know what Māori or Polynesians were eating but how they were eating it is also interesting and important too. This can be a bit of an odd idea to think about, I mean, surely you just put food in your mouth and that's really the extent of how anyone eats food. While that is more

or less true, think about how you make up your meals each day, do they often consist of the same food groups in the same proportions? Do you tend to cross over what you might have for dinner into what you would have for breakfast? While the answer to that question might be yes for some of you, cause who hasn't had last night's pizza for breakfast, I would be willing to bet that for most of you that you have the same sorts of things for each meal every day. Take myself for example, as a Pākehā bloke in a Western country I tend to have a grain cereal with milk for breakfast, sandwiches consisting of bread, meat, cheese and vege for lunch and for dinner, usually something with predominantly rice or pasta with some meat and vege within in it. As you can see, my diet usually consists of rather a lot of grains, a fair amount of dairy with some meat and veges added in for good measure. Although Polynesians didn't have the sort of diet that you or I might have, just like us, they had certain proportions of food and constructed their meals based on these proportions but it wasn't about, meat, dairy, vege and grains. Helen Leach, one our sources for this topic, talks about how most peoples of the Pacific used a binary food classification system, called kai-kīnaki. Kai, as we know it in Aotearoa today, encompasses all food no matter their origin, but back in the time when the only inhabitants of these islands was Big Bird and his mates, Polynesians used it to refer to starchy foods in particular. Things like breadfruit and banana. Kai foods would make up the bulk of a meal and be the most substantial portion. Kinaki, or kiki or similar depending on where you are in the Pacific, was the relishes and garnishes on the meal and wouldn't really constitute a large part of what was on the plate. Kinaki was usually things like proteins, fish and other meats, or some other green veges so although there wasn't much of them, they did serve a nutritional purpose.

Meals for the common folk would follow along these lines, with hangi, or umu as they would have been known, for everyday use being shallower than those used for feasts or other special occasions. Chiefs on the other hand though, had much more extravagant meals, as you might have already assumed. We actually get a first hand account of a Tahitian chief's meal from Banks when he accompanied Cook on his first voyage. He said the meal was made up of, "two or three cooked breadfruit eaten with one or two small fish cooked in leaf wrappers, then 14 or 15 ripe bananas and seven apples, and finally a starchy pudding made from pounded breadfruit base". It was presented with a side of coconut milk and fish seasoned with salt water. As you can see, the meal consists mostly of starchy stuff, the breadfruit, the banana and the pudding, with some extras, the fish and apples, though the obviously was a much larger meal than what regular folks could expect day to day. Even so, the chief was just a mortal being and could only eat as such so this would have left them pretty full, which was a qualifier for how good a Polynesian feast was. So in saying all that, it also isn't clear if this is meant to be a feasting meal or one the chief would be served every day. Additionally, feasts were the only time when pigs, dogs or turtles were eating, depending on the region and women would not be allowed to eat them.

Like many people and cultures in the past, pre-European Polynesian food would have tasted much different to our modern food or even the food in a post colonisation world as they didn't have access to the large amount of international spices that we do today. But that isn't to say that their food tasted bad or even bland. In fact, a lot of the flavour that was added into Polynesian food was imparted from a rather unexpected source. Most food that was put into a hangi or an umu would be wrapped in leaves so that all the food could steam together, share flavours with each other and protect it from the dirt that was thrown on top of it to bury it for cooking. The leaves wouldn't be just whatever they had lying around though, they would actually choose them based on what flavours they wanted to add to their food. For example, the noni tree would give food a lemon citrus flavour, giving rise to the name it is known by in Western science, *Morinda citrifolia*.

So that is what Māori were eating and how they were eating prior to their arrival in Aotearoa and as we have discussed, their horticultural habits changed drastically to be able to feed themselves in their new environment, as did their culinary practices. This change was the biggest in the early days of their migration, when their tropical crops would have begun to die out due to the cold leaving them with kūmara, taro and yams. This meant that a lot of their culinary culture, the way they prepared, constructed and ate meals, was severely compromised. Leach makes the comparison that it , “Would be like removing potatoes, wheat and dairy foods from our modern diet and telling us to ‘get on with it’”. This meant that Māori had to drastically change not only what they ate but how much of eat food group they ate. Within this there was a bit of a trade off, although they couldn’t eat starchy foods as much, at least until they figured out how to grow and store kūmara or look for aruhe, Aotearoa was absolutely bulging at the seams with huge walking protein machines, in particular moa and seal. Not only was this good as an alternate food source, it also meant that those that were too low rank to eat lots of protein often reserved for chiefs, now got to eat a whole lot more of it. It also meant that the size of hangi/umu would increase quite dramatically to accomodate the size of these animals, though there were still smaller ones hanging around to cook fish, kūmara and other small foods. Eating what you might call ‘feast foods’ all the time though, isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. Partially because you do need a balanced diet with some carbs and veges to get all the nutrients you need but there is also a mental aspect to it too, perhaps even a comfort aspect too. It’s kinda like when you were a kid, lots of us probably wanted ice cream and chocolate for every meal, breakfast, lunch, dinner. However, what you may actually find is that when you get up in the morning and are presented with a bowl of hokey pokey and a side of berry biscuit, you probably are just really not into it and would very much like some peanut butter on toast. It’s not a great example but thankfully Helen Leach gives us a much better one, “For me, the equivalent torture would be serving me roast beef on its own for breakfast, backed fish for lunch and barbecued chicken for dinner, day after day, week after week. In no time I would be begging for potatoes, rice or pasta.” So for Māori, they were eating their most decedant foods every day for every meal, which was probably only exasperated by the fact that they only starting to figure out that they needed to set aside some tubers to be able to plant them next, increasing their reliance on proteins.

One interesting thing we do see is to do with puddings. I mentioned this briefly before but often in Polynesia coconut would be used to make puddings, which became a problem once the supplies of coconut ran out in Aotearoa and by the time Cook turned up there wasn’t any evidence of Polynesian style puddings, or at least any evidence that he found. The reason I say that is later, probably some time in the late 19th-early 20th century, an architect and researcher of Te Reo by the name of Edward Tregear would discover that the Māori word roroi was related to the Samoan word loloi, both being a type of pudding. The Samoan version was made with coconut and the Māori version made with kūmara, I actually found a recipe on the Radio New Zealand website for roroi which is basically just grate kūmara and bake it until it resembles a mash. So although Māori didn’t have all the ingredients to continue their Polynesian culinary culture, they were able to find equivalents in their new home that did a similar job. We also see this with other dishes where seal oil and later pig fat would be used as lubricants instead of coconut.

In saying all this though, even when kūmara got a foothold and Māori were growing a fair amount of it, it still wasn’t enough to sustain the whole population. Other food sources were needed to suppliment it. Thankfully, Māori had other culinary practices that would help with this too, in particular the practice of going out to forage for wild plants to get the extra nutrients that cultivated crops and meat couldn’t provide. In tropical regions this would be things like arrowroot or wild varients of taro and yam. In Aotearoa, we already know the sorts of things that they were looking

for, stuff like mamaku, tī kouka, karaka berries and the very important aruhe. The next problem was making these plants palatable or even just edible, as in the case of say aruhe, it could be rather bitter in its raw form or alternatively for karaka berries, they were just straight poisonous and had the potential to be lethal. Once again, Māori had something for this in that they were already used to processing wild foods to make them taste better by removing the bitterness or to extract any dangerous compounds. So all they needed to do was figure out how to process these new foods, which makes me wonder how much science they had to go through before they figured out how to make karaka safe to eat? Interestingly, these processing times could be rather long which would annoy some Europeans who were exploring the New Zealand bush and needed to use the local flora to survive. One case saw Charles Heaphy, the man who the Heaphy Track would be named after and the first New Zealand soldier to earn the Victoria Cross, complaining about the fact that he couldn't eat mamaku straight away because it required 24hrs to process and cook properly to get all the nasty tasting stuff out of it.

With that we will call it there for this episode. A bit of a shorter one but this is a more natural point to leave it so that we can talk more about how Māori were eating next time. Speaking of which, next time will talk more about how Māori made their meals after arriving in Aotearoa and some more about feasts.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on historyaotearoa.com. You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. Other ways you can support us through Patreon, buy merch or give us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!