

# PLAQUE MARKS HISTORIC MAORI BUSH TRAIL

(Staff reporter)

Unnoticed by many, a concrete block with plaque on the Stratford-Ohura highway, a few yards from the Kahouri bridge, marks a historic Maori trail used when the Stratford district was covered in thick bush.

The inscription on the monument, placed by the National Historic Places Trust, reads: "Whakaahu River, half a mile below the Rangi, ancient Maori trail from Kairoa Pa near Lepperton to Ketemarae Pa near Normanby."

About 200 yards downstream, the Patea River joins the south-east corner of the Kopuatama cemetery area. It was here that the Maoris crossed the Patea.

Records held by the Stratford Borough Council describe how a Maori party, before the days of the European pioneers, made an exploratory trip from the

Europeans as Nairn's and General Chute's track. Crossing the Manganui River, half a mile below the present bridge on Tariki Rd, the Maori party waded the Patea. Running into swampy country, they turned off round the Ngaere swamp and reached the eastern side of where Eltham now stands. On the return trip from Ketemarae Pa, the Maoris blazed the trail. Their markings were later followed by various parties.

With a slight variation, this became the war trail marking the enmity between the northern and southern Maoris in defence of territorial hunting privileges.

Soon after the trail had come to be recognised as the path to the Maori settlements of the south, a chieftainess of Patea, Ruaputahanga, while returning from a visit to Kawhia, camped one night near where Stratford is now.

It was a clear starlight night, according to the records, and the chieftainess lay contemplating the stars before she slept. Her followers remarked that she lay with her face to the sky. "whakaahu-rangi" (whakaahu, to turn towards; rangi, the sky). So the locality was named and for many years Whakaahu-rangi was the resting place for travelling parties of Maoris.

## LOOKING at STRATFORD

Lepperton district southwards to the Normanby area.

Even so they discovered markings indicating that someone had been before them. They travelled a little to the east of the line on which the railway now runs.

Their route ran practically along the line of what became known subsequently by