

# Mataura River

► Maruawai  
► Life Force of the River

**Key Ideas** Significance of the Mataura River to the people of the district past and present.

## Story of Maruawai

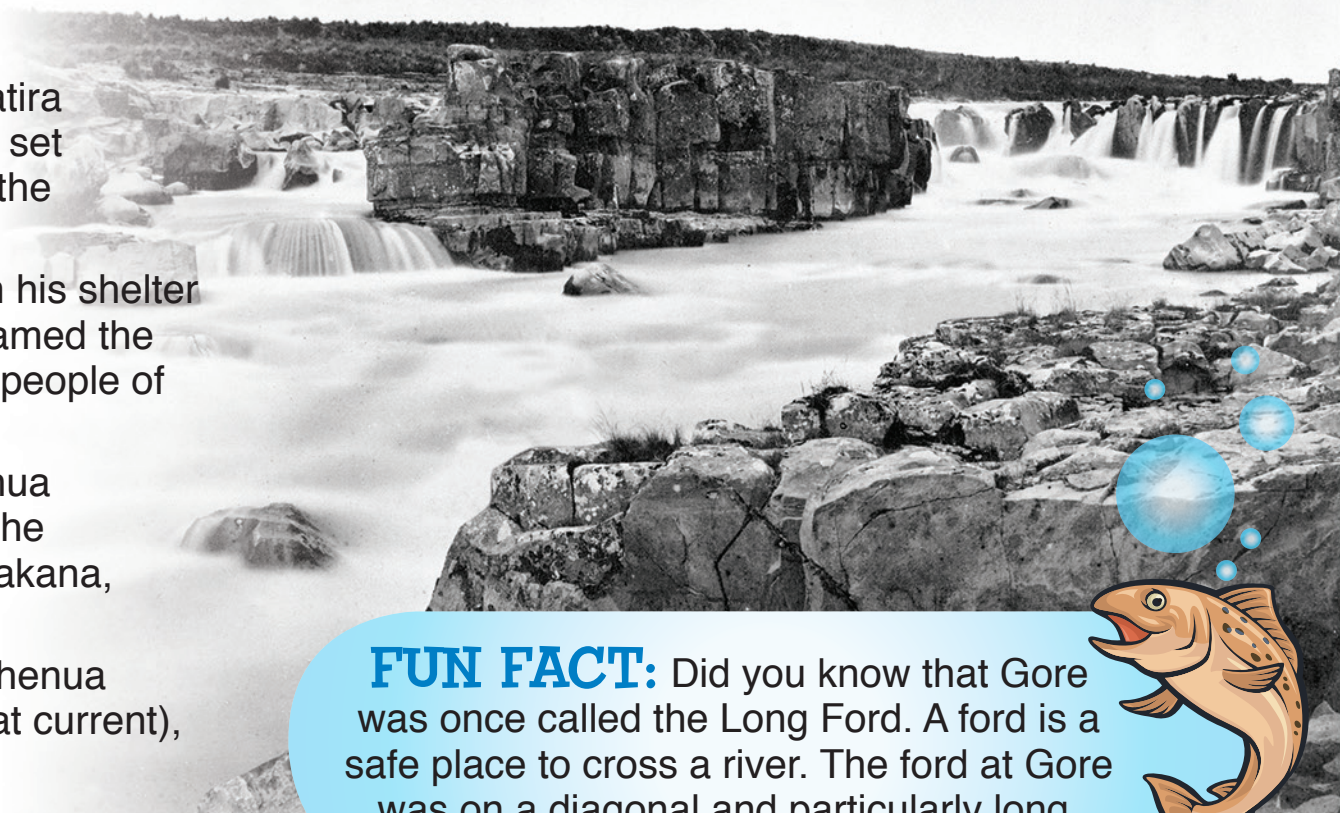
Paroparo Te Whenua, a Kāti Mamoe rangatira (local chief), was gathering food when rain set in. With his hunting group, he sheltered in the bush of the Hokonui Hills.

When the rain stopped, he looked out from his shelter and saw the valley covered in water. He named the area Maruawai, Valley of Water, to remind people of the Mataura River's tendency to flood.

As the flood waters fell, Paroparo Te Whenua noticed great numbers of gulls flying over the valley. On investigation he discovered kanakana, (lamprey) stranded in the falling waters.

Searching for their source, Paroparo Te Whenua found kanakana clinging to Te Au Nui (great current), the Mataura Falls.

Te Au Nui / Mataura Falls c.1880



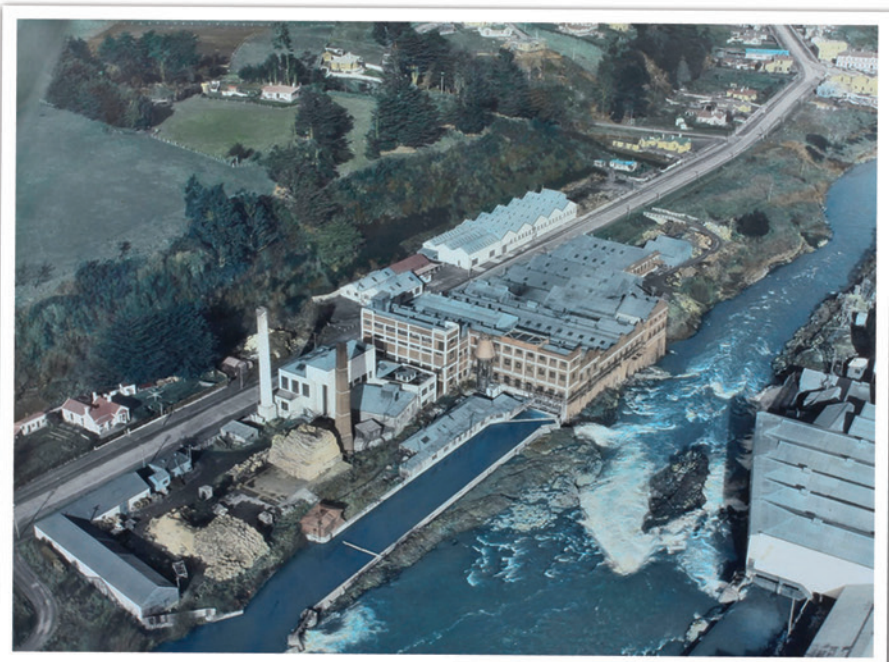
**FUN FACT:** Did you know that Gore was once called the Long Ford. A ford is a safe place to cross a river. The ford at Gore was on a diagonal and particularly long.



Kanakana (Lamprey), Mataura River



Aerial photograph of Mataura Paper Mill and Freezing Works (partial view) on the Mataura River



## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. Name 5 types of food you may have found in the District rivers.
2. What industries did the river power?
3. What do you need a special consent for?
4. What is the Mataura River internationally famous for?

## Life Force of the River

For the Ngāi Tahu whānui, Mataura River and its tributaries (rivers that feed into) Waikaia, Waikaka, Mimihaui, Mokoreta, Otamita and Waimea were important for two things. Firstly as a place of mahinga kai – food gathering. The rivers and streams were rich in food above and beneath the surface with kanakana (lamprey) and eels, fresh water mussels, inganga (whitebait), native trout and ducks.

The swampy land provided a ready home for birds such as bittern, pukeko, and weka as well as harakeke or flax, woven and used for food storage. Secondly, the waterways provided pathways for the transport of food to the coast where there were permanent settlements and as a watery map to the interior of Murihiku, Southland, including Wakatipu where pounamu was excavated.

From the 1880s, the force of the Mataura River was used to power industries including the Freezing Works and Paper Mill both at Mataura. For some years, the Freezing Works generated enough power for Gore and Mataura's needs. Gold dredges were also in place along the Mataura and its tributaries. Agricultural runoff, industrial and town waste end up in the Mataura River. Despite this, brown trout fishing on the Mataura is known internationally to be some of the best in the world.

In 2006, Mataura Te Awa Mātaītai, New Zealand's first freshwater reserve was created. The mātaītai provides for traditional management of food resources. The mātaītai stretches north and south of the town of Mataura and no person may take kanakana or eel without special consent.





# Mataura River

- 1913 Flood
- Tourism - Brown Trout
- Janet de Wagt



## Key Ideas

Significance of the Mataura River to the people of the district past and present.



◀ Gore Flood, 29 March 1913, corner of Mersey and Main Streets

▼ Gore Flood, 29 March 1913, East Gore looking back towards bridges



## 1913 Flood

On Saturday morning on 29 March 1913 Forrest Stephenson, aged 4, was fast asleep. Overnight there had been heavy rain and the Mataura River was in flood. There were no stopbanks then to protect the townships. Forrest remembers:

*'Well I remember being wakened, hurriedly put into my dressing-gown and stepping out of bed into fairly deep water lapping the side of the bed. Men came on horseback and took my sister and me away to higher ground, leaving my parents clinging to the verandah posts. They too were rescued but only when the water was up to their necks.'*

From: *Eight Daughters, Three Sons: Glenaray, Southland* pp.51-2

Forrest was lucky, she was rescued by visiting circus performers whose specialty was trick horse riding - they could carry several children on a single horse. Along with locals using horses and carts they rescued many people that morning.

There was terrible damage to homes, farms and businesses throughout the district. At the height of the flood, water flowed up to 1.8m through the Main Street of Gore, entering most shops and many homes. Half of Gore's residents could not return to their homes that night, some for weeks. Grocers suffered with sugar and salt dissolving leaving empty bags and basic foods such as flour were ruined.

At Waikaia and Mataura, homes were swept away. One Mataura cottage ended up in pieces at the Wyndham racecourse.

It was not until 1919 that work finally began on stop banks at Gore. This was largely because of WW1 making demands on the workforce and money.

### FILM STRIP ACTIVITY:

Create a film strip story of the 1913 flood.

## Tourism - Brown Trout

**Brown trout are not native to New Zealand. They were brought from Britain and Ireland for sport in 1869. The brown trout of the Mataura River attract tourists from all over the world - why?**

- Brown trout are a challenge to catch.
- Brown trout in NZ are much larger than in other countries.
- New Zealand has a self-sustaining population of trout. Most other countries stock their rivers with farm reared trout.
- In comparison to other countries, fishing in New Zealand is affordable.
- Lack of predators - bears are a hazard in the USA and snakes in Australia
- Brown trout like to sit close to the river bank or in shallow water. This makes for easy wading at the Mataura and accessible for all ages and experience levels.
- The Fish & Game access system is probably the best in the world. The Mataura River and tributaries have about 80 access point making it easy for anglers to find good fishing water.
- Dry fly fishing - the ultimate form of fly fishing. Due to large numbers of mayflies on the Mataura in comparison to most New Zealand rivers, makes the Mataura arguably the best dry fly fishing in New Zealand, if not some of the best in the world.

### ADVERT ACTIVITY:

Create a persuasive advert for a magazine showing why people should come to fish the Mataura River and its tributaries.

## A special place - Janet de Wagt

Janet inspired and coordinated the efforts of students from schools in Eastern Southland to create the Mataura River Art Project in 2014.

The Mataura River is the lifeblood of the land. It holds the stories of times past, times present and times future. It is a constant force in the landscape of the land and in the minds of the people who live and work around it. Much of the development and uniqueness of the areas it passes through has been shaped by the river. The Mataura River has many moods - dark and brooding, wild and flashing, calm and tranquil; similarly the stories of the people range from tales of murder and death to tales of great love.

The Mataura River Art Project by the children of Southland captured many of these moods and stories.



Student Artwork from Longford Intermediate

Where We Live  
Project Tūrangawaewae

