

Te Porere, Central Plateau

The last major fixed battle

The main part of the New Zealand Wars ended in 1865 with the defeat of Waikato. Just when the bang ended in a whimper is open to debate. Titokowaru's armed resistance had collapsed by 1869. East Coast guerrilla operations dragged on till 1872 under Te Kooti. After 1872 resistance, ever diminishing, became non-violent, such as at Parihaka in 1881. Some would argue that the last island of resistance lasted until 1916 when jumpy wartime politicians sent the police into Rua Kenana's Urewera community at Maungapohatu.

Te Kooti's generalship was mixed. He could hit and run with the best of them but he flunked set-piece, fixed-defence actions such as Te Porere. In an ineptly executed piece of misguided cultural shoplifting, Te Kooti or an ally (it is not clear who) built this British-style redoubt/pa on the bleak pumice lands at the western edge of the Rotoaira basin. It was about 20 metres square, had flanking angles (bastions) at the opposing corners and stood apart from a maze of trenches and rifle pits. But Te Porere, unredoubtable redoubt or below par pa, call it what you will, was a bad clone. The angles were poorly sited and the loopholes prevented the defenders from firing properly into the ditch, which the government forces speedily occupied after taking out two small detached positions. On 4 October 1869, for the cost of four dead and four wounded, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas McDonnell's forces, Ngati Kahungunu and Arawa as well as Europeans, killed 37 and captured nearly 30. Te Kooti got one thing right, though. The bush next to the pa provided good cover for his flight, wounded, with survivors.

The Historic Places Trust has administered Te Porere for nearly half a century. The early 'restoration' of the fort may not meet modern conservation practice but that does not detract from the importance of the site, the last major battle of the Wars.

© 2002 Original text – Gavin McLean.

Te Porere is off State Highway 47, between National Park and Turangi.

Further reading: Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs*, Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1995; Ormond Wilson, *The War in the Tussock*, National Historic Places Trust, Wellington, 1961.

