

General information about New Zealand Wars and Conflicts

More than 20 separate but related conflicts were fought in New Zealand – all but one of them in the North Island – in the decades after its incorporation into the British Empire in 1840. They ranged in duration from a couple of hours (the 1843 Wairau Massacre/Affray/Incident) to several years ('Te Kooti's War'), in geographical scope from a few acres (Wairau) to much of the eastern side of the North Island (Te Kooti), and in number of fatal casualties from zero (the 1898 'Hokianga Dog Tax War') to about a thousand (the 1863/64 Waikato War). Several thousand people died in total, the great majority of them Māori.

While the immediate causes – as well as the outcomes – of these conflicts varied, all involved contests between British (later, colonist) and Māori authority. Most were also fought over access to land and other resources. The adversaries, contemporary observers and subsequent generations recognised these common features and coined generic terms for the campaigns. These terms embodied implicit or explicit judgements about causes, culpability, location and participants. In the 21st century, questions of nomenclature continue to frame New Zealanders' understanding of the internal wars of the colonial period.

New Zealand Wars?

The first 'New Zealand Wars' were those fought among 'New Zealanders' (meaning Māori) in the early 19th century. Causing up to ten times as many deaths as the post-1840 fighting, these bitter conflicts became known collectively in the 20th century as the Musket Wars, both to distinguish them from later campaigns and in recognition of the fatal impact of the new weapon that was deployed in many of them.

Both the 1845/46 fighting in the Bay of Islands and the 1860/61 battles around New Plymouth between British Army regiments and local iwi were labelled 'the New Zealand War' by British newspapers of the day. The reporting of events across a global empire that was often embroiled in several colonial wars at the same time was aided by geographical clarity.

The subsequent increasingly complex campaigns were identified, especially within New Zealand, by region and chronology – Waikato War, East Coast War, Second Taranaki War – or by presumed perpetrator – Tītōkōwaru's War, Te Kooti's War.

The term 'Māori Wars' was applied first to pre-contact fighting among Māori and later to the Musket Wars. Then, for a century from the early 1860s, Māori Wars was the most common collective expression for the group of conflicts under discussion here. As the historian Keith Sinclair noted, this reflected the British predilection for naming colonial wars after their enemies – Zulu War, Boer War, and so on. But 'New Zealand War(s)' never entirely disappeared from usage. Medical officer Morgan Grace's *A Sketch of the New Zealand War* was published in 1899, and the term was given a powerful boost by the title of James Cowan's state-funded two-volume 1922/23 history of the fighting between 1845 and 1872.

A few Pākehā wrote of the 'Anglo-Māori Wars' as long ago as the late 19th century. In 1967 Alan Ward gave this term a new lease of life in a *New Zealand Journal of History* essay which argued that the wars had been a defining conflict between two distinct peoples. From the early 1980s, however, the historians Michael King and especially James Belich ensured the renewed ascendancy of 'New Zealand Wars', at least in Pākehā academic discourse.

Land Wars?

The 1861 reprinting of an editorial in London's *Free Press* newspaper denouncing the iniquity of 'The New Zealand Land War' (in this case, the [First] Taranaki War) may have been the first publication of this term in the colony.

The 1860s conflicts were characterised as 'Land Wars' by British humanitarian organisations such as the Aborigines Protection Society, and the term was also taken up by a few anti-government New Zealand newspapers. It then seems to have fallen out of use until 1965, when it was advanced by the historian of political thought John Pocock on the grounds that it was more accurate than 'Māori Wars'.

Māori anxious to hold onto their remaining land – and from the 1980s, to obtain redress for lost land via the Waitangi Tribunal or direct negotiation with the Crown – have in recent decades often referred to the conflicts as the Land Wars to emphasise the scale of the economic and social deprivation which resulted from the post-1860 loss of land.

In 1986, the Historic Places Trust, at the behest of its Maori Advisory Committee, advised its branches to use 'Land Wars' in preference to 'New Zealand Wars'. It also advised them to consult with local Māori on the names of battles and campaigns. For example, the term Ngā Pakanga Whenua o Mua – 'The Land Wars in Years Gone By' – has been used to refer to a series of conflicts in North Taranaki. Keith Sinclair asserted in *The Origins of the Maori Wars* (1957) that Māori had an overall name for the wars: 'Te Riri Pākehā' – 'The White Man's Anger'. (Preliminary research has not unearthed contemporary use of this term, for which Sinclair did not give a source.)

Commemorating the Wars

The petition initiated by students of Ōtorohanga College and presented to Parliament in December 2015 requested 'a national day of commemoration for the New Zealand Land Wars'. Budget 2016 allocated \$4 million over four years for 'New Zealand Land Wars' commemorations, which iwi leaders subsequently decided will take place annually on 28 October, the date of the signing in 1835 at Waitangi of He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni / The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand.

David Green, Ministry of Culture and Heritage
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