

MAHIKA KAI PRACTITIONER REPORT: WAHINE TOA HUNTING

Pania Tepaiho Marsh

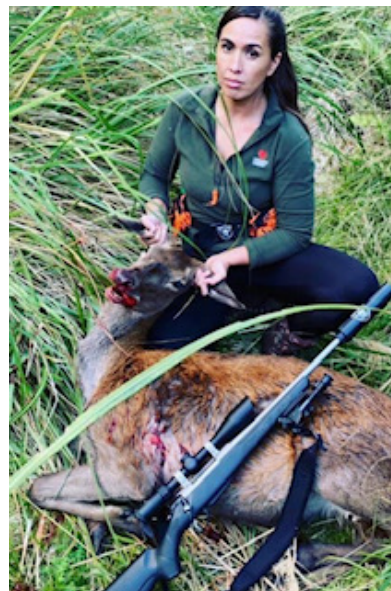
Founder of WAHINE TOA HUNTING

Pania Tepaiho Marsh was a Keynote Speaker at the Mahika Kai Conference in 2019 and is a hunting practitioner that is focused on supporting women to feed their whanau be part of a sisterhood and provide opportunities to utilise our natural resources to fill our freezers.

My name is Pania Tepaiho Marsh and I am the Founder of WAHINE TOA HUNTING, which was started in May 2018.

Background

This kaupapa was formed in response to stories about women who were struggling to afford food to feed their whānau because the cost of living in New Zealand was too high. These high costs were ridiculous and I saw a need for our New Zealand women to learn how to fill their freezers and their kids' pukus. Additionally, women also gained knowledge of living off the land and how to hunt for themselves. For WAHINE TOA HUNTING, filling their freezers is the price of a bullet.



We also do not charge the women for these lessons in hunting. Instead, given the importance of this kaupapa and the impact this has on families, we fund this out of our own time and own money. For me, once I do start charging for our lessons, the ones who need the knowledge the most to fill their freezers will miss out and I cannot allow that to happen. That goes against

everything WAHINE TOA HUNTING stands for which is filling freezers, sharing skills and bringing people together.

The response to this initiative has been unexpected. Although we know this kaupapa was important, we did not expect our waiting list to grow quickly with currently 3,200 women waiting to go hunting. This does not include the WAHINE TOA HUNTING Facebook inbox which has over 1,000 unopened messages. Based on these numbers, the wait time for women is approximately 6-7 years.

How Wahine Toa Hunting is run

I choose the group about a month before the hunt and send them a list of gears that is required for the hunt. On the day of the hunt, we meet at my house, I go through and double check all their gears, and supplement anything required from our hunting gears that are usually donated second hand by amazing supporters of our kaupapa.



From there, we undertake rifle training. We use a .308 Mossberg rifle as it got the kick we need to take down a stag quite easily. We then go through all the safety drills including how to action the rifle, how to load the magazine and respect the rifle. Then we get the women to shoot the rifle. I always find they are so nervous and tend to freak out a bit beforehand, and that is completely understandable. They are very hearty rifles and this is usually the first time many of these women have seen a rifle or a rifle of this calibre in real life. But I will say this whanau...the only way my rifle can hurt while I'm teaching you is if I threw it at your face (lol), but if you're listening properly and locking it in hard in to your shoulder, there is nothing to worry about .



Once we finish rifle drills and depending on daylight left, we head back and have a few “light refreshments” and korero about who we are, our lives, and to be honest this is my favourite part . Because you see, WAHINE TOA HUNTING is more than just learning to live off the land, it’s about the sisterhood, entering this wānanga as strangers, but leaving as whanau. We stay out in the bush overnight wherever we are, usually in a hut with no

power and just open fire and good korero.

The hunt

When it is time to go out, we sort out our gear, double and triple check our gears again and after breakfast, we head off into the bush. It is then, that we put all the skills learnt into action. When I take the first timers out to the bush, I make sure our hunts are not too back breaking. I find that it is less likely that women will return to the bush or going hunting again if the person you are teaching is pushed way beyond their physical means. They will not enjoy it and will not going hunting again. Of course, hunting isn’t easy but I do believe in building them to that level over a few hunts.

These hunts can last up to four hours with a really good success rate for kills. But also, sadly sometimes as most hunters can tell you, it can end up being a nice nature walk instead, but hey that’s hunting.

Future of Wahine Toa Hunting

Unfortunately, on New Year's Day, our sisterhood suffered a huge loss with the passing of one of our sisters, Parekura, who was going to start teaching her own roopu of WAHINE TOA HUNTING in the Bay of Plenty and help me with this kaupapa. This has been a huge blow for us. However, she would want us to continue this kaupapa - she was hearty like that.



Our next initiative is WAHINE TOA DIVING, which will be teaching free diving during our hunts so the kai basket of Tangaroa can provide for our women as well as the Ngahere. If you would like to follow our kaupapa of WAHINE TOA HUNTING or have any questions, please feel free to follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

Mauri ora whānau.