

HOW FIRE CAME INTO THE WORLD

According to the old stories, there are two goddesses of fire. Mahuika is the goddess of common or ordinary fire, and Hine-i-tapeka is the goddess of subterranean or volcanic fire. Hine-i-tapeka is also the younger sister of Mahuika and Hine-nui-te-pō, the goddess of death. This story tells what happened when Māui deceived Mahuika, the goddess of ordinary fire.



One day Māui put out all the fires in his village. His mother Taranga told him to go to his ancestor Mahuika to ask for her for more fire. When he got to where the old lady lived, Māui asked her for fire. Mahuika took one of her fingernails, five of which were known as the Fire Children, and gave it to Māui, warning him to be careful while carrying the flame in case it went out. When Māui was out of sight, he put out the flame and returned to the old lady to ask for another, which the old lady gave him.

Once again when Māui was out of sight, he put out the flame and returned to Mahuika to ask for another. Mahuika gave him another flame, and when Māui was out of sight, he extinguished the flame and returned to the old lady to get another. The old lady became angry, and started whinging at Māui, before she gave him her fourth fingernail. Only one fingernail remained. Once again when Māui was out of sight, he extinguished the flame and returned to Mahuika. Despite her anger, Mahuika gave her last fingernail to Māui, who when out of sight, extinguished the flame.

The old lady was so angry when she saw Māui coming, as she realised he had been deceiving her! He had destroyed all of her Fire Children. Mahuika called out to her younger sister to come and kill Māui. As the fire of Hine-i-tapeka came, Māui ran, followed by her volcanic fire, which engulfed the trees, the plants, the Earth Mother herself. The fire of Hine-i-tapeka nearly burnt the whole of Mother Earth.

Māui cried out to the Gods to send hail, thunderstorms and heavy rain to quench the fire of Hine-i-tapeka. With the falling of all of these things, the fire of Hine-i-tapeka was extinguished. However some of the her sparks and embers hid in the kaikōmako tree and according to some tribes, some of these sparks can also be found in patatē, pukatea and tōtara trees.

In the end, Hine-nui-te-pō, the elder sister of Mahuika and Hine-i-tapeka, avenged the deceiving of her younger sisters by killing Māui.

