

THE FISH OF MAUI

(a Maori legend, New Zealand)

The half-god Maui was fishing one day with his brothers when he landed a giant fish. Maui's brothers did not really want to take him fishing that day because he was known as a trickster and rarely went fishing. But his sisters-in-law had been berating him for his laziness.

Before the expedition, Maui went to the burial cave of his grandmother and stole her jawbone to make a magic hook. Then he hid himself under some mats on board his brothers' canoe. Once they were at sea, he came out of hiding and asked his brothers for some bait for his hook. When they refused, he punched himself in the nose and smeared the blood onto the hook so that he could also fish.

Almost at once he got a bite: a huge bite, pulling the hook and line down deep. Maui heaved and pulled while his brothers paddled the canoe to try to lift the fish from the bottom. When, at last, it came to the surface, the fish was as big as the land.

With the fish lying on the surface the brothers all started to argue about what to do with it. Maui thought that he should find a priest to bless his wonderful catch and went off in search of one. The brothers, however, were impatient and jumped on the fish, trying to hack at its flesh.

The giant fish wriggled and twisted and its skin rucked and buckled into mountains, valleys and ravines and, by the time that Maui had returned with the priest, the flesh had turned to soil and rock. The fish was now an island.

The outline of this island still looks like the huge skate that Maui caught and that is why The North Island of New Zealand is called Te Ika a Maui: the fish of Maui.