

A vision for Waipoua

"Waipoua — a museum for kauris to rot in" — Forest Service, 1952.

Today such an attitude would be laughed out of court; however in 1952 the notion that forests did not need tending like a garden was virtually heresy, making McGregor's achievement in obtaining state protection for Waipoua nothing less than Herculean.

He spearheaded a 50,000-strong petition to Parliament, so weighty that it was trundled in on a wheelbarrow, seeking a National Park for Waipoua in its entirety. Instead he got a Sanctuary containing only the dense kauri forests and upland hardwood forests. The unique coastal forests and regenerating kauri heathlands were omitted. McGregor had won a war, but much of his battleground remained unprotected.

The virtues of Waipoua have long been lauded by politicians, officials and the New Zealand public. Many, such as Prime Ministers William Massey and Joseph Savage, had a personal concern for its integrity.

Originally it was safeguarded from the ravages of logging by its inaccessibility. But as the lowlands surrounding Waipoua were cleared for farmland, pressure was put on the Government to push a road through the forest. Massey refused to sanction the road; however, following his death in 1926 work was commenced. At the time McGregor declared it would drive a wedge through the heart of the forest (a wedge which has been driven deeper with the recent destructive road widening).

Logging started in Waipoua in 1943 for the "war emergency," despite timber being available in other areas. This "emergency" logging continued at an accelerated rate after the war had ended. Much of the kauri was exported and some ended up as fence posts and battens.

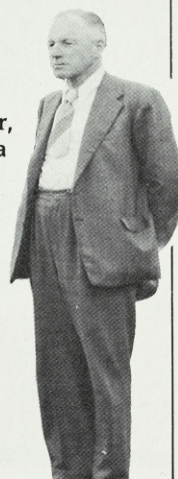
Waipoua addition

The present 9105-hectare Sanctuary is merely the nucleus of a much larger area of forests and shrubland worthy of protection. Two recent moves may bring a Waipoua National Park much closer.

In January 1985 Forest and Bird proposed a 3000-hectare addition to the Sanctuary to take in the lowland and coastal forests and heathlands between the Sanctuary and the Tasman Sea. This area is one of the few sites on the west coast of the North Island where there is a continuous forest sequence from coastal to upland forests. It has a number of other unusual features: giant kauri stands on sand dunes surrounded by heathlands; unique kauri-monoao-silver pine forests; a colony of the rare *Pittosporum pimeleoides*.

For more than a century the majestic kauri has been topped at an alarming rate until only remnants of this wonder of the forest world remain today. One of these — Waipoua Forest on Northland's west coast — was not protected until conservation stalwart Professor Barney McGregor took up its cause. Waipoua was created a Sanctuary in 1952 — but had in fact Barney McGregor won his battle? Not entirely. Society northern regional officer Mark Bellingham outlines two important new reserve initiatives which bring McGregor's vision closer to reality.

Professor Barney McGregor, chief advocate for Waipoua Sanctuary.



Other features of interest in the reserve proposal include several Maori settlement sites along the Waipoua and Wairau rivers and fossilised kauri trunks in the sandhills — evidence that kauri giants may once have grown right to the ocean edge.

Two new loop tracks have been proposed to link a coastal route with the old Coach Road in Matarau Forest and a Wairau River route with the famous Cockayne kauri (outside the Sanctuary), plus the Sanctuary giants Tane Mahuta and Yakas. Both walks would take trampers through a range of fascinating forest sequences.

A journey along the Wairau River shows how arbitrary our legal boundaries can be.

Rising high in the Parataiko Range, this watercourse trickles down onto the Waipoua Plateau. Each year thousands of visitors cross the footbridge over the Wairau as it winds sluggishly past Tane Mahuta within the swampy upland kauri forests.

Reaching the edge of the plateau, the river suddenly loses the protective cloak of the Sanctuary as it rushes seaward, tumbling over rapids and down waterfalls, dropping some 350 metres along its 13 km course. Along the length of the river sand grey columns of pristine kauri, mixed with tarairi, tawa and totara; this is the only Northland river with a virtually untouched catchment. Yet much of this unique area is still unprotected in a "kauri management zone", a Forest Service brainchild which demands that other species are ringbarked in order to boost logging volumes of planted kauris.

The Forest and Bird Waipoua Sanctuary extension proposal has still to be evaluated by the Government's Protected Areas Scientific Advisory Committee; however, within both the Forest Service and the scientific community there is considerable support for it.

McGregor Reserve

The second Waipoua initiative is the 146-hectare McGregor Reserve, opened in December 1985 by the Native Forest Restoration Trust on the south side of the Sanctuary.

This reserve, affording magnificent views across the Sanctuary, is grassed in the centre but will be revegetated. Much of it is tawa-tarairi forest studded with many giant totara.

The speed with which money had to be found to finance purchase of the reserve provided members of the Trust with some heart stopping moments. At the beginning of October the Trust knew it had only six weeks to find \$102,500, though the financial burden was reduced somewhat with an offer of \$40,000 from the QE II National Trust, provided the appeal could raise the remainder.

Owen Lewis, Chairman of the Native Forests Restoration Trust, points out that the appeal was an interesting lesson in the importance of every individual's effort. Most of the money consisted of small donations from thousands of people, and the deadline of November 20 was met with ease.

Opposite: The white rata vine, *Metrosideros albiflora*, an attractive climbing plant found throughout kauri forests. Photo: Brian Enting

Inset: The picturesque Waipoua River viewed from the Waipoua bridge. It has been suggested that the main factor in saving Waipoua was the lack of a major stream flowing to a suitable harbour from where the logs could have been shipped. Photo: Brian Enting