

# Mt Hikurangi

## Alpine Bastion of the North

by **Ron Adams**

**"M**ake it memorable". These words have stuck with me as the mark of a good school field trip. Pupils these days are privileged with a variety of outdoor experience — sports and cultural trips, adventure camps and field studies. Parents and pupils are asked often to dig deep to finance trips and may question the value of getting out into wilderness areas to experience and appreciate their diversity and beauty.

As New Zealanders we should have little trouble organising memorable field trips; our land still has many unique pristine habitats which can provide excellent once-in-a-lifetime memories. Uniqueness is a sound and basic idea in the presentation of conservation and exploring unique places makes trips memorable. Let me take you to such a unique place.

At the northern end of our mountain axis lies the fifth peak in the North Island, often assumed to be the first place in 'the world' to see the sun. This claim is based on the height of Mt. Hikurangi (1752m) and its nearness to the 180th Meridian and International Date Line. However, precise calcu-



Field trips provide young people with the conservation awareness that will help preserve special places such as Mt Hikurangi for future generations. Left to right: Justine Bird, Jason Walker, Philip Jones, Kelly Eagles, Debbie Bakker, Ritia Henry. Photo: Ron Adams

lations taking into account longitude, latitude, elevation and time of year, suggest that high points on Mahia Peninsula and certainly some offshore islands (Chathams, Bounty and Antipodes) may see the rising sun first during the summer solstice.

Fortunately the uniqueness of Hikurangi need not rest solely on this claim. None the

less, the rising sun really does produce an imposing shadow reaching high into the western sky on a hazy morning, for Hikurangi is a tilted buttress that stands alone against a backdrop of the main Raukumara Range of which it is a part. The meaning of 'Hikurangi' is sometimes given as 'fishtail in the sky' (Hiku, tail of a fish; rangi, sky), a

description similar to that given by Cook in October 1769 when he called it a 'remarkable double peak'.

### **Amazement stirred**

As our school minibus enters the Tapuaeroa valley five bumps of land stand tall (and very distinctive when mantled in winter