

Whanganui National Park — a Celebration

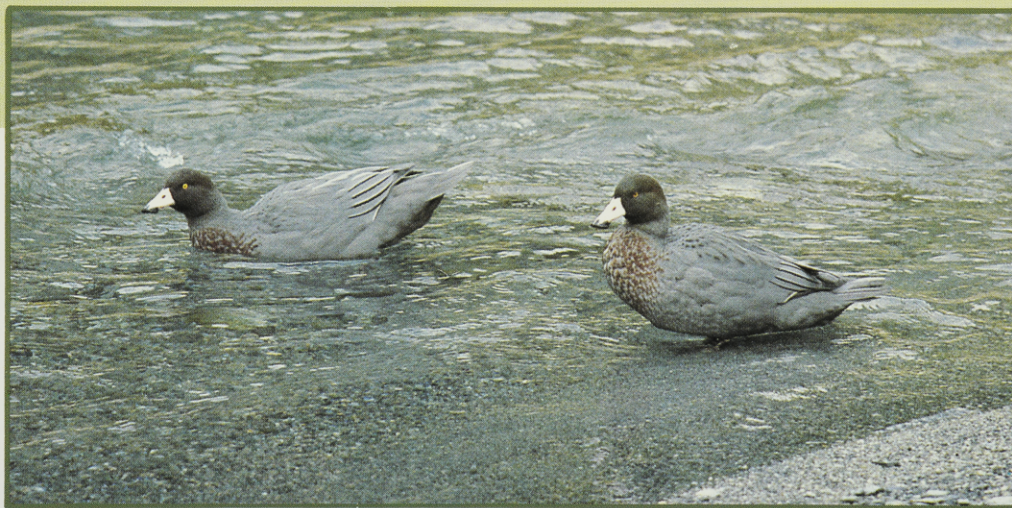
THE LEGEND

Several mountains once stood, like noble gods, high above the land in the centre of the North Island. Tongariro, the greatest of them all, lived beside Ngauruhoe, Ruapehu and Taranaki, while nearby stood the lovely maiden Pihanga. With her cloak of deep green bush folded closely around her shoulders, Pihanga was an object of great beauty. All the mountain gods loved her, but the one she chose was the venerable white-haired Tongariro.

What had been a long, peaceful existence for the mountain gods was disturbed when Taranaki could no longer keep his feelings in check, and dared to make advances to Pihanga. A mighty conflict between Tongariro and Taranaki ensued, which shook the very foundations of the earth. The mountains belched forth their anger and darkness clouded the sky.

When peace finally came to the land Tongariro, considerably lowered in height, stood close by Pihanga's side while Taranaki, wild with grief and anger, tore himself from his roots with a mighty wrench and left his homeland. He plunged recklessly towards the setting sun, and upon reaching the ocean turned north, finally coming to rest in grand isolation, a mountain god in his own domain.

Great was his path of sorrow, for as he fled, Taranaki had torn a long, deep wound through the earth. Soon from the side of Tongariro there sprang forth a stream of clear water which filled and healed the wound Taranaki had made in the earth. Green forests, filled with the songs of birds, grew on the banks of this new formed river, which we know today as the Wanganui.



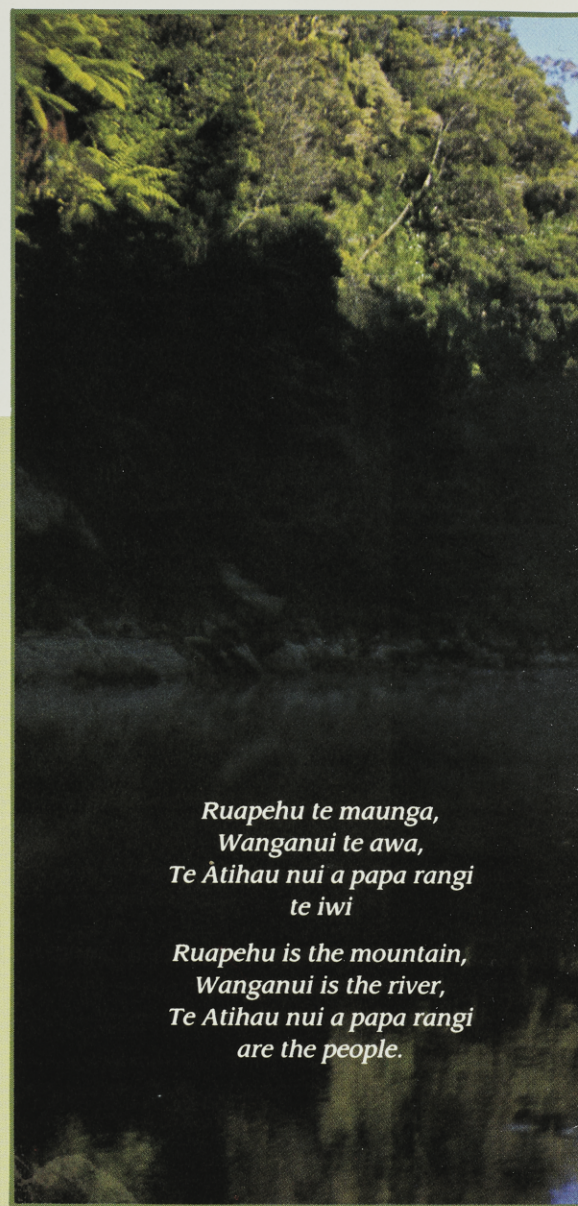
The creation of Whanganui National Park on November 29, 1986, marks further acceptance of the idea that we should not set aside only mountainous areas for parks, but lowland regions as well, for it is over the latter that generally the economic sacrifices have to be made. With the imminent gazettal of Paparoa National Park this year, this trend continues.

As all those know who have tramped along the Whangamomona Walkway, explored the Mangapurua Valley or canoed the Wanganui itself, the new national park will have much to offer the visitor. If one seeks wilderness, in places continuous native forest stretches as far as the eye can

see; if human history is your interest, the 74,000 ha national park is full of it.

Of all our national parks, Whanganui National Park (only the fourth in the North Island) is most closely associated with human settlement, partly because it is a lowland park and partly because it contains within it the 329-km Wanganui River, the longest navigable river in New Zealand. At present the river does not belong to the park, subject to negotiations with Maoris whose traditional home is the Wanganui.

According to Maori genealogy, Maoris first occupied the river as long ago as 1100 AD, although it was not until 1350 that the people who were to become known as Te



*Ruapehu te maunga,
Wanganui te awa,
Te Āti hau nui a papa rangi
te iwi*

*Ruapehu is the mountain,
Wanganui is the river,
Te Āti hau nui a papa rangi
are the people.*

The middle and isolated reaches of the river valley are rich in wildlife. Whio or blue duck (pictured) are found in the headwaters and tributaries while bellbird, pigeon, tui and yellow-crowned parakeet are common. Several populations of native bats have been recorded in the national park. Photo: Alan Reith

Āti hau nui a papa rangi began drifting into the area to settle. Evidence of their past remains in the 147 archaeological sites recorded within the park, most along the river margins.

European explorers, missionaries, traders and farmers have played their part in the story of the Wanganui. It is a testament to the resilience of nature and the rugged aspect of the Wanganui hill country that in many instances only traces of this habitation remains.

A new era for the Wanganui region has begun, in which people will not make their way into the hinterland in order to tame the land but rather to enjoy its scenic splendours. 🦋