

# TIME

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# FOREST

*Bay of Plenty conservationists have been involved in a 15-year battle to gain permanent legal protection for the Kaimai-Mamaku State Forest Park. Here executive councillor Carole Long outlines why the forest is so special.*

This has been a long hot summer in the Bay of Plenty. The grass is crisp and brown, and the convoluted skyline of the Kaimais stands clear every evening. Aongatete may carry its morning cap of mist from the Waikato occasionally, but the bog forest on the summit is as dry as it has ever been. The creeks and rivers continue to flow from their source in the forests, slaking the thirst of the ever-widening throat of horticulture, farming and domestic use.

Showing no sign of being satisfied is the thirst of thousands of local people for permanent legal protection of these forests. This is the fifteenth year of the campaign to have the Kaimai-Mamaku forests protected. Society Field Officer Kevin Smith remembers vividly the first meeting in 1972 when Mangatotara was at risk — this was the start of Kevin's involvement in conservation. The most notable battler for the Kaimai-Mamakus is Tauranga's Reg Janes, Distinguished Life Member of the Society, who still plays a most vital role in the campaign by his presentation of the history and values of the Park at Tribunal and committee hearings.

Most Bay of Plenty residents are able to see the skyline of our Forest Park from their homes or as they travel to and from work. In Papamoa and Te Puke the forested hills of Otawa are very close, and recently overseas tourist parties visiting kiwifruit



orchards have included the virgin forests of Otanewainuku in their itinerary.

These forests arguably offer the best chance for survival of the kokako, and their richness in plant and bird life is well known. The Kaimai-Mamaku region has been recognised, indeed since the time of Cockayne, as an important part of one of the two most significant botanical transition zones in New Zealand. Major elements of the New Zealand flora (kauri, beech, kamahi, etc.) here mix to form unique combinations of plant cover. The region includes good quality podocarp-hardwood forests, remnants of impressive stands of southern-limit kauri, as well as open stunted stands of northern-limit silver beech at quite moderate elevations. Historically the Park contains areas of great interest, with a long history of use from Maori times to the gold mining and timber milling eras of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Mystery to Many

Though the Park covers 40,000 hectares and is 70km in length, it remains an undiscovered mystery to many, as there is no Park Headquarters, and no road signs guide the public into the many tracks and huts available.

An excellent map and track handbook has been produced by the Forest Service. This can be obtained from the local Branches and from the new Department of Conservation office in Tauranga. Local Forest Service recreation officers have run three summer programmes of guided walks in the Park and the response has been staggering.

Thousands of children visit the Park's lodges each year from local primary, intermediate and secondary schools. Parents who are involved as helpers never fail to marvel at the beauty of the bush, rivers and waterfalls, and gain with their children an understanding of the value of such outdoor