

Kahakaharoa, the big dune at the northern entrance of the Hokianga Harbour. The investigation includes these places because they are such significant sights in a journey about Northland. Divorcing them from nearby forests is like closing your eyes to the Sutherland Falls or the glaciers on a southern journey. The diversity of reserves is like the concept of the Otago Goldfields Park, or the contrasting islands of the Hauraki Gulf Park. United by the kauri symbol, they preserve the essence of the wild north.

The park proposal also looks further north, to the shores of the Hokianga Harbour, where there is a further focus of Crown forests. On the northern shore is nearly 7000 hectares of Warawara Forest where kauri was milled into the early 1970s. Stretching inland is another 10,524 hectares of contiguous forest, with frequent kauri, in Raetea Forest, Maungataniwha Forest and Mangamuka Scenic Reserve. Eastwards towards the Bay of Islands another 13,760 hectares of forest includes the kauri of Omahuta, Puketū (northern home of the kokako) and Manginangina.

There are also the broad hills of eastern Northland, backing the remote coves of the outer Bay of Islands. Ngaiotonga Scenic Reserve rises from a broad river of mangroves through a succession of northern forest types to kauri on its ridge. Along with Russell Forest it contributes a further 7000 hectares to the proposal. Among other large blocks to be considered are Tangihua Forest (3240 hectares), Herekino (4745 hectares) and the bleak tableland of the Ahipara Gumfields (2925 hectares).

## Kauri Theme Approach

The forests are not solid kauri — the tree does not grow like that — but like the big podocarps of the south it forms associations with other trees, often dominating the warm ridges with its broad-spreading head. The kauri exists in different stages of growth too, all worthy of representation in a “kauri theme” approach. Waipoua has the densest concentration of mature trees, some over 1000 years old. By contrast the southernmost reserve, Pukekaroro, is a conical hill of young trees emerging in fresh, green rickers above the sombre kanuka which nursed it. Pukekaroro would serve as the park’s sentinel for travellers about to confront the Brynderwyn Hills where Northland proper begins.

The gumfields are part of the proposal because of their significance in the story of kauri. Ahipara is a high tableland where poor white kauri soils bear little but stunted manuka and, seasonally, orchids. The roots of burned and vanished forests poke out of the claypans where gum diggers washed their hard-won nuggets earlier this century. At Lake Ohia, on the eastern side of Kaitiaki, holes where gum diggers probed and excavated gum about a wilderness reserve preserving the typical gumland plants — a kind of stunted shrubland — and the giant stumps of kauri trees flattened by some cataclysm more than 30,000 years ago.

Elsewhere there are sometimes signs of pioneer milling — just as there are in parks like Urewera and Paparoa and Abel Tasman. That damage does not diminish the case for preserving what remains here either.



*Part of the kauri story is the human history. Kauri dams are a testimony to the ingenuity of pioneer bushmen, although they were hardly efficient as many trees were damaged as they hurtled down streams, or else they became embedded in the ground, impossible to extricate. Photo: Gordon Ell, Bush Press*

The fact is that much of the north was built on kauri. From the 1790s merchants were about the coasts of Coromandel and in the north seeking spars said to be on Nelson’s ships at Trafalgar. Coastal ports flourished, as exporters to Australia and the Pacific, besides supplying the timber to

the gamut from preserving Waipoua and its neighbours, through a Hokianga model to a broader Northland one, and a “kauri matrix model” which took in harbours, coastlines, historic houses of kauri and a range of covenanted land, including museums and Maori protected lands. The Northland board chose a Northland model, expressly excluding private property and Maori lands. There will still be scope for private groups to work in with a park proposal by offering covenanted lands — one group already has — but the investigation and the park idea is firmly based on better protection and management of existing public land.

## Maori Land Claims

As it is, much of the Crown land in Northland is subject to land claims by Maori people under the Waitangi Tribunal Act. These cases may take a while to resolve but in the meantime the park investigation proceeds. The process will include consultation with Maori people of the region.

The Park Board is charged by its Act to identify areas for protection and can make a recommendation without prejudicing any Maori claim. In the Far North, for example, the Park Board has already gained official endorsement for its Te Paki National Reserve, protecting much of the northern tip of New Zealand. That region too is subject to a Maori land claim. The Board’s case is approved but no further action towards declaring a National Reserve will be made until the land claim is settled.

Maori feeling for the forests may be deep and traditions of places and trees are still a part of life. At Waipoua an archaeological project, advised by Maori people, has revealed settlement in the forest going back perhaps 900 years. Everywhere in the north dramatic Maori fortress pa are a tangible symbol of the cultural heritage which per-



*Maori legend records that the Mamari canoe was wrecked just south of the Maunganui Bluff on Northland’s west coast and is now a reef there. This sheer bluff, rising 460 metres out of the sea, is being investigated for the park proposal. Photo: Gordon Ell, Bush Press*

build our own settlements. Ship building yards began before New Zealand was officially declared a colony and many famous sailing vessels were built of kauri beside the northern rivers. While some “kauri” towns survive as service centres and holiday resorts, the map of the north includes the ghosts of long-gone towns and ports, vanished with their supporting forests.

In an official’s paper (to a joint meeting of the Northland Parks Board and the NPRA at Paihia last August) District Conservator John Beachman put forward five possible models for a kauri national park. They ran