

OUR KAURI HERITAGE

A NATIONAL PARK FOR THE NORTH

A new national park to protect the Crown kauri forests has been proposed by the Northland National Parks and Reserves Board. A preliminary investigation by officials of the Department of Conservation is underway, involving local communities, and a report on possibilities is due in October this year. Gordon Ell, Deputy National President of Forest and Bird and a member of the Northland National Parks and Reserves Board, outlines the proposal.

Whatever the outcome, this survey of remaining kauri forests will probably determine their future for all time. Estimates vary about the amount of kauri forest surviving but it is generally agreed to be only 2 percent to 4 percent of the forests which once clothed vast areas from the vicinity of Auckland northward. Yet these remnants are often substantial forests — three separate areas in themselves exceed the recommended minimum of 10,000 hectares required for a national park.

In all, the kauri national park proposal includes more than 92,000 hectares of Crown forests in Northland. Until recently only a tiny fraction was formally reserved.

The turnaround in kauri forest protection has been the recent Conservation Act which encompasses the old State forests and forest parks of the New Zealand Forest Service into the Department of Conservation. The bringing together of the national kauri estate, under one "ownership", has made the kauri park proposal possible at last. Only six years ago the National Parks and Reserves Authority rejected a proposal to create a National Reserve out of Trounson Scenic Reserve. This magnificent relict north of Dargaville was at that time the only major kauri forest protected by the Reserves Act. Yet, at a mere 566 hectares, Trounson is now dwarfed by the adjacent Waipoua Forest Sanctuary of 12,884 hectares. While Waipoua was controlled (and protected) by the New Zealand Forest Service it remained "out of bounds" for the Park Board's efforts to protect the symbolic tree of the north by giving it "national status".

Serious Omission

Despite two magnificent offshore maritime parks — Hauraki and Bay of Islands — the

Auckland region lacks a mainland park regarded as "of national importance". This is not a matter of parochial disappointment; it is a serious omission in our system of protecting different natural areas. It means that while the beech and podocarp forests of the south are largely representative of the "subantarctic" zone, New Zealand's "subtropical" plants and trees lack the formal protection of national park. It is as if the plants of the north are somehow less worthy of protection, yet its forest types are arguably just as exciting and impressive.

North of a rather eccentric line which crosses the island about Auckland there lives a range of plants and trees unknown, in nature, further south. The kauri may be the most upstanding but the red-blossoming pohutukawa clinging to the coasts and the mudbound mangrove growing below high tide are among the more spectacular of plants which distinguish our subtropics. While there are scenic reserves, and now conservation lands taken from the Forest Service, there is no formal national park system to protect this heritage.

The kauri national park proposal looks at the remaining forests between Auckland and Kaitia and advocates a broad-based park, aggregating most of the Crown forests there. It extends beyond the immediate vicinity of Waipoua (some 22,511 hectares including Waima and Mataraua forests) to take in a further 10,000 hectares along the western coast of Northland — protected remnants like Trounson and Katui (295 hectares), deep enclaves in the once vast kauri lands of the northern Wairoa.

Also in the brief of the park investigation are such spectacles as giant Maunganui Bluff (rising 460 metres sheer from the sea) and landmarks like the Kai Iwi lakes and



Lake Ohia. Remains of a kauri forest from more than 30,000 years ago are preserved in the peaty lake waters. Forest and Bird saved this unique gumland from farm development in 1985.

Photo: Gordon Ell, Bush Press