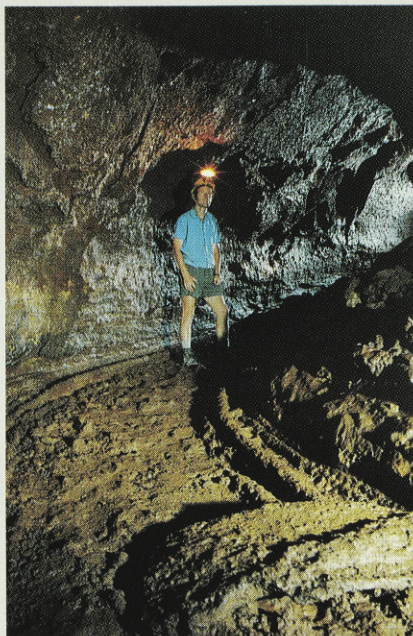


Wiri Lava Cave, Auckland

The 15-year campaign to save Wiri lava cave in South Auckland highlights the damage suffered by landforms of the young Auckland volcanic field since human colonisation.

Much of Auckland City's beauty and character is derived from its volcanic landscape centred on the 50 or so scoria and tuff cones formed by periodic eruptions over the last 100,000 years, yet in the last 150 years not one has escaped untouched by human vandalism. Many have their craters and peaks modified by reservoirs, playing fields and parking areas, their lower slopes pockmarked by abandoned quarries and covered in suburban housing and apartment blocks. Some, such as the Three Kings and in Manukau City have been harder hit and are now remembered through the aggregate they provided to the city's roads and concrete edifices.

Basalt lava flows such as those erupted in the Auckland field, sometimes enclose unusual lava caves, formed when molten lava inside continues to flow out leaving an elongate cave. Lava caves still survive on Rangitoto and in the One Tree Hill, Onehunga and Mt Eden areas, but by far the best surviving example is at



Lava that flows in "streams" down the gentle slopes of a volcano rapidly cools on the outside to form a solid crust. The hot liquid lava inside may continue to flow out to leave a hollow lava tube or cave, such as this one at Wiri, Auckland. Negotiations are presently proceeding to secure this important landform from destruction by quarrying – the culmination of a 15-year campaign to persuade the owners, Railcorp to do so. Photo: Lloyd Homer

Wiri, Manurewa.

In the early 1970s, the Geological and Speleological Societies jointly approached the owners, NZ Railways, asking them to protect this cave from damage by blasting in the nearby railways' quarry. NZR refused to negotiate formal protection, although Manukau City listed it on their District Scheme and invested thousands of dollars in its protection by strengthening the road that passes over it.

On several occasions in the 1980s, vigilance by local speleologists has saved the cave from destruction by encroaching quarrying activities, as swift pleas to government ministers brought temporary reprieves.

The case came to a head in 1987 as Railcorp prepared to realise its aggregate assets by sale or lease of the whole quarry, including the cave, to private enterprise. Lobbying by the Speleological and Geological Societies brought local media and television coverage and greater support than previously. This initiated a drawn-out period of negotiations between Manukau City, DoC, Railcorp and others, which recommended some form of permanent protection, but as yet no action has resulted.

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Whakataki

North of Whakataki low tide reveals a remarkable series of parallel lines in the dark platform of a 217 The "barren and green" effect results from alternating layers of dark sandstone and white sandstone that extend on and on. The original layers of sand and mud – dunes – were deposited on the sea floor about 20 million years ago. Over time they were tilted up to 60° to the west at a rate of 10° per 1000 years, or 1000 years at the west, although this is a very fast rate as geological time goes. The Wairarapa coast is being tilted at a similar rate today.

