

Whirinaki



CRAIG POTTON

Dinosaur forest, David Bellamy called it. One of the most faithful representations of a Mesozoic plant community remaining on earth, said John Morton. But it wasn't until 1984 that the stupendous podocarp trees of Whirinaki Forest east of Lake Taupo were finally granted full protection after a major campaign by conservationists. IAN CLOSE looks at Whirinaki today, 12 years after the logging stopped.

MY APPROACH TO Whirinaki Forest is not inspiring. For over 30 kilometres the Rotorua-Wairoa road runs through pine forests – large sprawling human artefacts such as Kaingaroa, the largest planted forest in the southern hemisphere.

Whirinaki today is the 60,000 hectares that were left of a much greater forest when the chainsaws finally ceased in 1984. The last five percent of the dense tall-stemmed podocarp forest left on earth.

Rimu, totara, matai, miro and kahikatea – the ancient giants of New Zealand's podocarp species – achieve some of their greatest glory in the