



Kauri seedling



MARIOS GAVALAS

# Kauri Replanting on the Coromandel

MARIOS GAVALAS describes a project to restore vanished kauri forests.

**B**y the time the bushmen and logging companies had exhausted the accessible kauri, only 0.3 percent of the original Coromandel forest remained. In little over a century of wanton recklessness, a living forest, dominated by mighty kauri, was reduced to bare land. It is the legacy of this destruction that the 'Kauri 2000' project is concerned with repairing.

Kauri 2000 was the brainchild of Cliff Heraud, a resident of the eastern Coromandel Peninsula, who 'could not help but be humbled by the presence of a mature kauri.' The project has been set up to help recreate the kauri forests that once clothed the Coromandel. By celebrating the millennium in a tangible and enduring way, the project hopes to create something with the potential to last into the fourth millennium.

Even by global standards the kauri *Agathis australis* is regarded as a noble tree. Its family, the *Araucariaceae* to which the genus *Agathis* belongs, evolved 150 million years ago in the Jurassic period, and has spread around the western Pacific from Malaysia to New Zealand.

The genus is characterised by trees with massive columnar trunks and the tendency to live to an old age. The kauri is no exception. With a girth commonly greater than 16 metres (although rarely found like this today), and a height to the crown approaching 50 metres, the kauri once ruled the forest canopy in northern New Zealand. It can be up to 18 metres to the first branch.

To the Maori of Northland and the Coromandel it ranked second in importance only to the totara. Like totara, kauri was used for building canoes.

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