

The light, durable, straight-grained timber, combined with its enormous proportions also made it attractive for use by European settlers. As early as the 1800s, British vessels were taking logs for use as spars, and for shipbuilding; later kauri was used in house building, bridges and railway sleepers. Craftsmen made use of its easily worked and knot-free nature to make furniture. Later still, the rich gum exuded by the tree was used to make varnish, polish and linoleum.

From the 1830s onwards, there came a period of almost complete annihilation of the kauri forests. Timber that was not milled was often burned along with the remaining bush to clear land for farming. On the Coromandel, only isolated stands in remote watersheds or atop rugged hills remained. It is this paucity of mature kauri that the Kauri 2000 project is aiming to redress.

By December this year, the project aims to have planted at least 3500 kauri seedlings. This will continue in the long term with 5000 or more plantings per year from 2001 onwards.

*Mature kauris are characterised by an open and spreading crown. They can attain heights of up to 18 metres to the first branch. This huge quantity of merchantable timber made them attractive to loggers.*

'Nearly 300 hectares have been allocated around the Coromandel by local councils and the Department of Conservation,' says Cliff Heraud. 'Sites in reserves and green-belt areas are being made available, where it is suitable for kauri to grow.'

The kauri prefers drier sites, usually on hillsides and ridges. Once a seedling becomes established it can grow relatively quickly and produce seeds from female cones at about 30 years old. Kauri 2000 selects seeds sourced from the Coromandel and rears the vulnerable seedlings in special nurseries.

Each tree is approximately 600 millimetres tall when planted and about two-and-a-quarter years old.

Alongside every tree planted, an individually numbered and inscribed commemorative marker will enable donors to identify 'their' tree. For a donation of \$10, anyone in the community, whether individual, family, school, company or other organisation, can buy a seedling. Mass plantings were held in June-July when conditions are favourable for young trees to be planted out.

Forest and Bird has given its support to the project by donating \$1000.

'This money will be made available through schools and Community Resource Centres to purchase trees for children and families who would otherwise not be able to take part,' says Mona Candy, chair of the



MARIOS GAVALAS

*Cliff Heraud, who spearheads the Kauri 2000 project planted this two-year-old tree. Every June the project hopes to organize mass plantings to reforest the Coromandel with kauri.*

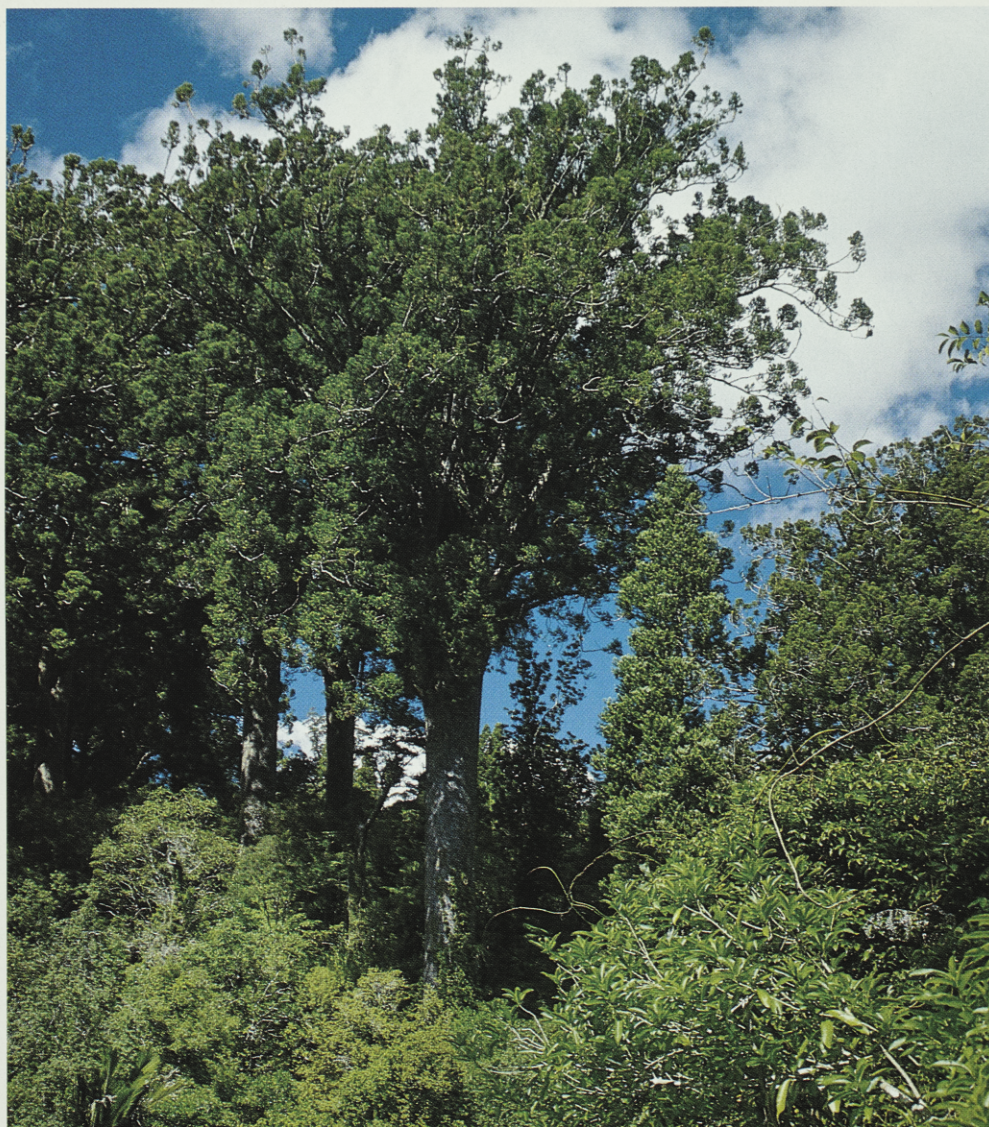
Mercury Bay section. Support from Forest and Bird has also come from Upper Coromandel and Thames branches. Even Forest and Bird central office in Wellington has been involved, organising the distribution of leaflets at the Ellerslie Flower Show.

To ensure each seedling gains the best start in life, planting areas have been cleared of scrub and sprayed to reduce competition from weeds. All trees planted on Kauri 2000 sites will be recorded, monitored and managed for healthy growth until they are well established.

Anyone wanting to plant a tree on their private land can buy a 'Kauri 2000 Treepack Voucher'. The package consists of a kauri seedling, one packet of 'crystal rain', slow-release fertiliser, a numbered and inscribed tag, and a leaflet containing guidelines on site selection, planting and care of young kauri.

Cliff Heraud says that as the growth rate for a kauri over its first 30 years is relatively fast, the younger generation especially will see something for their money. He thinks it particularly important to involve the younger generation, as they will be the future custodians of all natural resources. The project is working closely with teachers to build Kauri 2000 material into a range of curriculum topics. These resources are to be delivered via the Internet.

Although Kauri 2000 uses the millennium to help capture public imagination, it hopes to continue well into the future. Long after the project has run its course, there will be a potent memory of its work. Hopefully, by the time the next millennium comes along, many of the planted kauri will have matured into 'benevolent' old trees.



MARIOS GAVALAS