

The Waitakere Ranges form a natural barrier between Auckland City and the surf lined Tasman Sea on the west coast. The highest point is 474 metres (over 1500 feet). Parts of the ranges have been selectively logged (many commercially viable trees were cut down between 1860 and 1930), while other areas were completely cleared for pastureland. These areas have been regenerating naturally over the last 90 years. Some tracts of virgin forest still remain.

The Waitakere Ranges Regional Park was formed in 1940, and measures about 180 square kms or 70 square miles.

The **Arataki Centre** (the Park headquarters and visitor centre) looks over a water supply reservoir and the Manukau Harbour. This is Auckland's second harbour and is connected to the Tasman Sea. In the other direction, there are views to Downtown Auckland, the Sky Tower, the Waitemata Harbour and which is connected to the Pacific Ocean.

Karekare has a waterfall in a glade not far from its black (iron) sand beach. Scenes for the Oscar winning movie "The Piano" were shot on this beach in 1993. More recently, New Zealand's award-winning entry in the Chelsea Flower Show was designed by a local woman and inspired by the Karekare area.

Piha is famous for the iconic vista over the beach and Lion Rock. The black iron sand here and at Karekare originated as dust from a volcano 250 kms (150 miles) away.

Because of New Zealand's isolation, its **plants and animals** have many unique characteristics:

Plants:

- Black fern – largest of tree ferns. Spiral shape of new frond (koru) common motif in NZ art.
- Silver fern – leaves have silver underside, New Zealand's national plant.
- Pohutukawa – largest coastal tree, masses of red flowers in December, New Zealand's 'Christmas tree'.
- Nikau – world's southern-most palm.
- Kauri – a conifer famed for the quality of its wood. Found only in the top 1/3 of North Island. Can live for over 2000 years and develop a massive cylindrical trunk. Intensively logged, but small numbers of mature trees left. Produces an amber-like resin (kauri gum).

Native Animals & Birds:

New Zealand has very few land based native animals - only bats, frogs and lizards which are seldom encountered. Common native birds include:

- Tui – similar in size and appearance to blackbird but with white tufts on its chest and iridescent green wings. Beautiful song and a large range of other croaks and clacks from its two voiceboxes.
- Kereru (Wood Pigeon) – a large forest bird. No song but heavy wing-beats often heard.
- Fantail – a small friendly bird that follows groups through the forest eating the insects their feet stir up. Distinctive due to its fan-like tail.
- Pukeko – this black and blue New Zealand swamp hen, with distinctive red beak and feet, is one of the few native birds to have flourished since the arrival of man. Often seen in marshes and on roadsides searching for food.

Introduced Forest Animals:

- Australian Brush-tailed Possum – seriously destructive to our plants and trees. Found throughout New Zealand and believed to number at least 30 million.
- Mustelids – weasels, stoats & ferrets - kill large numbers of our native birds.

Manuka Honey:

Manuka is a widespread bush or small tree with small white daisy-like flowers in early summer. The honey derived from these is New Zealand's most popular native honey. In its strongest and purest form it has remarkable anti-bacterial properties. Scientific research shows that the honey will kill all common skin bacteria, so it's used as an antibiotic cream and on medical dressings to treat ulcerated legs and pressure sores.

Geology:

The dormant Auckland Volcanic Field, around the central suburbs, has over 50 volcanoes that have formed over the last 150,000 years.

About 20 million years ago, a huge undersea volcano off the shore from Piha ejected enormous quantities of rocks that were eventually compressed into a conglomerate up to 300 metres (1000 feet) thick. Tectonic movement lifted this layer to form the Waitakere Ranges. Much later – about 2 million years ago – two rows of volcanic vents formed. One was along the present coastline and the other along Scenic Drive. 'Lion Rock' at Piha and 'The Watchman' at Karekare are lava plugs formed when those vents stopped erupting.

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Iron Sand



Tui on Kowhai Tree



Fantail



Wood Pigeon



Pukeko



Pohutukawa



Kauri Tree



Rimu



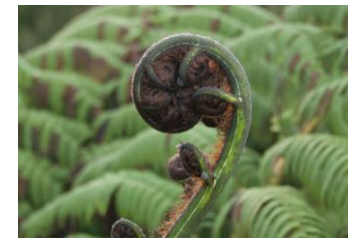
Possum



Manuka Flower



Nikau



Koru



Silver Fern