

Otanewainuku Forest

Information Sheet



The Otanewainuku Conservation area is 1200 hectares of native virgin forest largely unmodified by human activities. It offers a glimpse into the majestic forests which once covered this land, where giant rimu pierce the skyline and inquisitive North Island robins greet visitors.

Otanewainuku lies 25 km south of Tauranga, on the Mamaku ignimbrite plateau with soils derived from weathering of underlying volcanic ash. Otanewainuku Mountain is an extinct volcanic peak and at 645m it rises above the surrounding forest.

A walk to the summit offers impressive views of the Bay of Plenty. On a clear day the central mountains of Tongariro National Park are visible. On the other side of the road the rimu loop track is an easy walk passing giant rimu. The track to the Whataroa waterfall branches off the rimu loop.

Guardians of the Forest

Credit for retaining this remarkable forest must in part go to the early settlers who set aside the area as a reserve of unlogged and unmodified forest when last century land clearing and forestry were changing the landscape. Local landowners have continued to lobby for protection of the forest as development prospectors have come along.

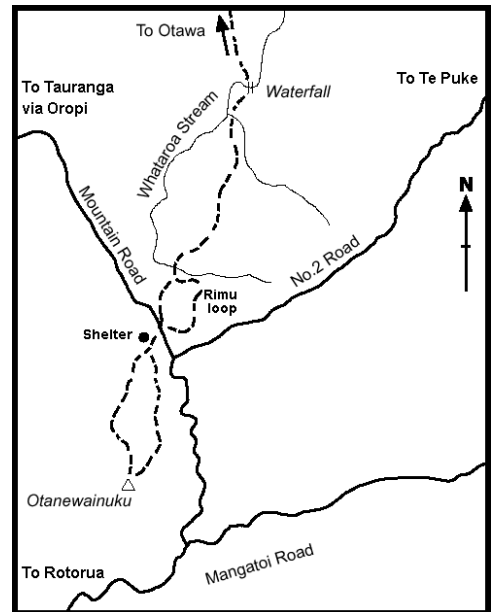
The Otanewainuku Kiwi Trust was formed in 2002, it is a community based conservation trust and operates under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Dept of Conservation who administer the reserve. The Trustees and volunteers are considered to be guardians of the forest, developing an integrated pest management programme to protect all native flora and fauna at Otanewainuku. They also play an important education role in providing information panels on site, guided walks for school and tramping groups, and talks to service clubs, scouts and community organisations.

Volunteers are the life blood of the trust, with many thousands of km travelled and thousands of hours given. Work includes clearing trapping lines, making traps, checking and baiting traps, co-ordinating volunteers, monitoring kiwi using radio tracking equipment, administration, newsletters, and more.

Maori Legend

According to local Maori legend Otanewainuku is a chiefly mountain. Both Otanewainuku and Mauao (Mt Maunganui) vied for the affections of the beautiful mountain Puwhenua. When she chose Otanewainuku as her lover the rejected Mauao decided to drown himself in the sea. He sought help from the Patupaiarehe (creatures of the mist) but had only reached the shore when dawn came, trapping him at the water's edge. Forever he must stand, first to see the rising Sun, looking back at Puwhenua and her lover Otanewainuku.

The name Otanewainuku means "the many waters that spring forth from the domain of Tane - overseer of the forest." Many springs form waterways that flow into major river systems such as the Kaituna (ending at Maketu Estuary) and the Waimapu ending in Te Awanui (Tauranga Harbour).



Flora

The Otanewainuku conservation area is a splendid example of an unmodified podocarp/broadleaf type forest. It has magnificent examples of mature rimu, tawa and pukatea, and king ferns are also worthy of note. The forest holds a diverse range of flora with one study recording 302 indigenous plant species.

The make-up of vegetation varies over the area dependent on the microclimate. Major canopy species are rimu, tawa, kohekohe, rewarewa, pukatea, hinau, tanekaha, mamaku, mangeao, matai, kahikatea, miro, Halls totara, kamahi, tawari and pigeonwood. These majestic trees support a rich variety of epiphytes including orchids, perching lilies, rata and puka vines.



Understory species include kawakawa, silver fern, kanono, supplejack, nikau, kiekie, toropapa, mahoe, lancewood, fivefinger, pate, and gully tree fern. Groundcover is mostly crown ferns, hen and chicken fern, and seedlings of the above species.

The mature forest has allowed a thick carpet of leaf litter to build up on the forest floor. This provides a home for in excess of 1000 different species of invertebrates which in turn provides a rich source of food for kiwi, other birds, geckos and skinks. The litter also provides ideal conditions for seed germination from which the next generation of flora springs.

Wildlife - Fauna

Otanewainuku is fortunate to have retained good sized populations of native birds, numbers of which are further boosted by ongoing pest control work carried out by the Trust. The forest is home to North Is brown kiwi, North Is robin (toutouwai), tomtit (miromiro), wood pigeon (kereru), tui, white head (popokatea), bellbird (korimako), silvereye (tauhou), morepork (ruru) and grey warbler (riroriro).

The kiwi population has been boosted by the release of captive bred birds. Numbers had dropped sharply in recent years, from around 50 birds in 1984 to just a few in 2006. While Otanewainuku provides near perfect kiwi habitat they are under pressure from stoats, ferrets, feral cats and dogs. A lone kokako resided in the forest for many years. In order to protect this endangered bird DOC relocated Otanewainuku kokako to Little Barrier Island in 1983.

The Trust has reintroduced kiwi and kokako to Otanewainuku. See more on our website www.kiwitrust.org

Otanewainuku is also home to other native animals. The long tailed bat has been identified; native snails and two species of forest gecko have been found. The rare striped skink and more common copper skink may also be present as they have been located close by. Native frog populations have yet to be surveyed.

