



Rangitoto

Rangitoto, the only volcano of its type in New Zealand, emerged from the sea around 600 years ago in a series of fiery volcanic explosions. Further eruptions sent red-hot lava flows down the sides of the volcano, forming the black basaltic rock that now makes up much of the island. Today Rangitoto is the largest, youngest and least modified of about 50 volcanic cones and craters in the Auckland volcanic field. It is probably extinct, although the Auckland field is only dormant.

The island's name is derived from the phrase 'Te Rangi totongia a Tamatekapua – the day the blood of Tamatekapua was shed'. Tamatekapua was chief of the Arawa canoe which arrived about 1350, and was engaged in (and lost) a major battle with the Tainui at Islington Bay.

Maori History



There are several Maori myths associated with Rangitoto. One tells of the children of the Fire deities, who inhabited the Auckland area. One night a husband and wife quarrelled and cursed the fire deity Mahuika. She complained to Mataoho, the deity of earthquakes and eruptions, who sent an eruption to destroy the couple's mountain home. It was swallowed up by the earth and became Lake Pupuke on Auckland's North Shore, and Rangitoto rose out of the sea. When mist surrounds Rangitoto, it is the tears of the couple as they weep over their lost home.

Maori were living on Motutapu Island when Rangitoto erupted from the sea depositing layers of fertile volcanic ash on their island. The dramatic appearance of this spectacular landmark ensured it an important place in Maori history and mythology. It has remained a place of considerable significance to Maori and is considered wahi tapu (a sacred place). Rangitoto's rocky terrain was unsuitable for permanent settlement, though there is some evidence of coastal fishing villages. It was used as a look-out over the Hauraki Gulf and its islands.

European History

Although at first reluctant to buy an island that was 'all rock', in 1854 the Crown purchased Rangitoto for £15 from its Maori owners. The island was designated a public domain in 1890, and became a popular destination for picnickers and boat trippers.

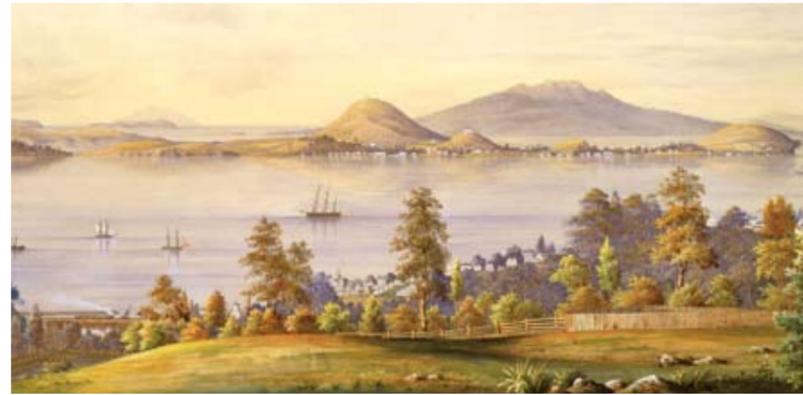
During the 1920s and '30s, prisoners built 19 km of handpacked roads and trails, some of which are now used as walkways on the island. The island's roads were built between 1929 and 1936. Bach sites were leased to help pay for island developments. There have been small numbers of people on the island for over 80 years, including a few permanent residents in earlier years. When the present leases end the intention is to preserve some of the baches for their historic and architectural interest.

During World War II Rangitoto was a prohibited area and the summit was used as a base for harbour defence fire control and as a radar station. There was also a large complex of buildings at Islington Bay from which the harbour's minefields were operated.

The Department of Conservation now looks after the island in partnership with the tangata whenua, seeking to conserve its natural and historic features and to provide recreational opportunities.



Minefield base at Islington Bay built during WWII. Photo: 1948. RNZN Museum



Devonport and the Waitemata Harbour from above Parnell - 1877 Watercolour Alfred Sharpe Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ

Vegetation

The lava rock of Rangitoto seems an inhospitable environment for plant life. It is highly porous, there is no soil, little permanent water, and the black rock soars to very high temperatures. But on this strange and alien landscape, a distinctive plant community is developing.

Mosses, lichen and algae are the first plants to colonise the bare lava. Later on in the process of succession, pohutukawa trees establish and are the dominant tree. Rangitoto now has the largest remaining pohutukawa forest in New Zealand.

Pohutukawa seeds take root, in humus-filled crevices on the lava. As they grow, they form islands of vegetation, their branches sheltering, shading and growing humus for other plants like mingimingi, koromiko, and puka. Eventually the "islands" of vegetation link to form a continuous forest cover.

Rangitoto hosts over 250 species of native trees and flowering plants, more than 40 kinds of fern, and several species of orchids. Although most are common species, they often behave in unique ways because of the unusual conditions. Mangroves, which usually grow in the mud of tidal estuaries, are found here growing directly on lava. An alpine lichen, usually found high in the mountains, grows at sea level. Unusual hybrids have developed, such as a cross between a

Visiting the Island

What you need to bring

- Water/drink. The only drinking water available is a fountain at Rangitoto Wharf.
- Sturdy walking shoes/boots that can cope with the island's rugged lava surfaces.
- Sunhat and sunscreen. The heat rays reflecting off the lava can be intense.
- A torch if exploring the caves.

There is no accommodation on Rangitoto, but neighbouring Motutapu has a basic campsite at Home Bay, and an outdoor education centre and lodge at Administration Bay.

Looking after the Island

Please

- Dogs and cats are not allowed on the island because they are a threat to native birds
- Do not light open fires. There is a barbecue at the causeway.
- Please do not pick vegetation, or disturb historic artefacts – they belong here
- Take your rubbish off the island with you. There are no rubbish disposal facilities on Rangitoto
- Keep to the tracks so you don't disturb plant life, or endanger yourself on the lava
- No firearms
- No camping
- No mountain bikes

Non-compliance with these conditions may result in prosecution.



Safety Watch
0800 999 005

Report any safety hazards when you visit a conservation area

Welcome

Rangitoto Island, one of 47 islands included in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, is administered by the Department of Conservation. Day visitors are welcome to the island, and can explore a number of well-marked tracks and roads. Visitor information is sited at Rangitoto and Yankee Wharves.

Getting There

Fullers Ferries run a regular ferry service. Take care not to miss your ferry back as there is no overnight accommodation on the island and alternative transport to the mainland is expensive!

Fullers have a concession to operate a 4 wheel drive guided tour to the start of the Summit boardwalk (10 min to Summit).

(Phone 09-367 9111 for bookings and details.)

For more Information

DOC Information Centre
ph 09-379 6476 fax 09-379 3609
email: aucklandvc@doc.govt.nz
website: www.doc.govt.nz

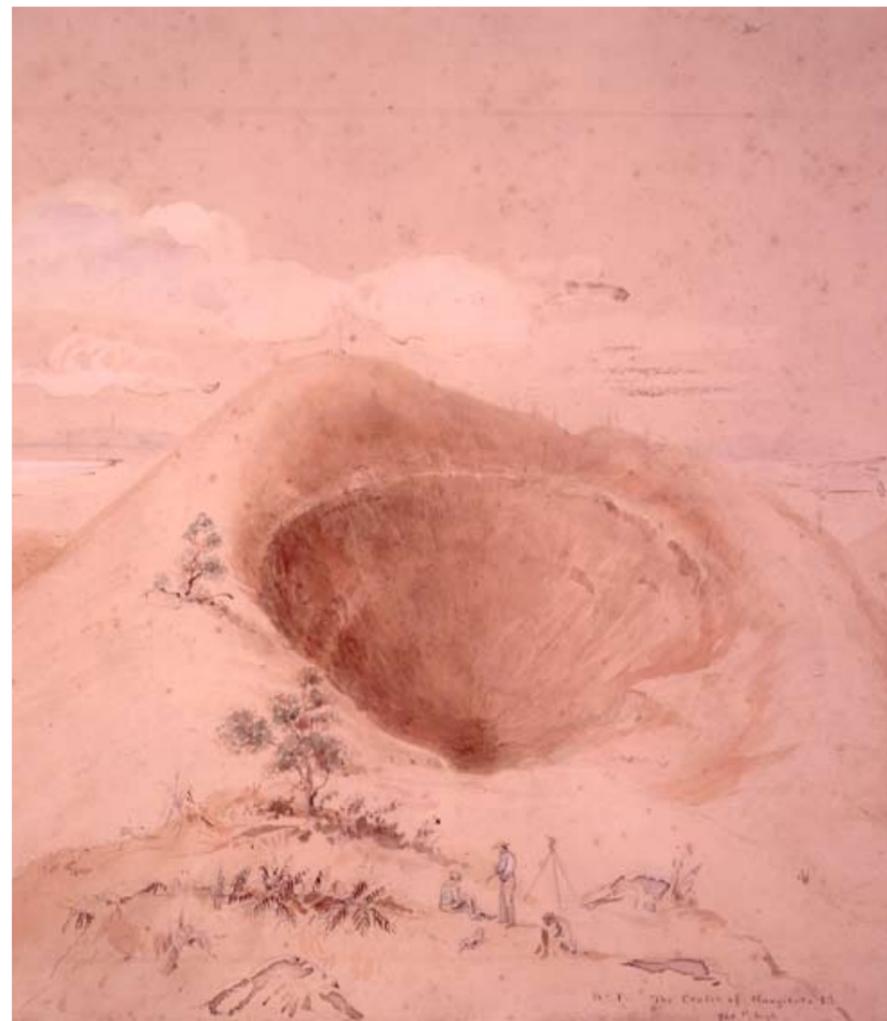
For information on bach restoration contact: Rangitoto Island Historic Conservation Trust, 33 Marine Parade Herne Bay
Contact Elizabeth Andrew 09-634 1398 or Susan Yoffe 09-445 1894

Emergencies:

To report accident, fire or other emergencies contact Motutapu Ranger
Ph: 09-372 2060/(0274) 372 576 or Auckland Conservancy Office 09-307 9279 (24hrs) or Fire: Ph: 111

Missed the last ferry? Phone the Water Taxi for assistance 0800 Taxi Boat (0800 829 426)

Rangitoto Island Scenic Reserve Hauraki Gulf Marine Park



The crater of Rangitoto Island - Charles Heaphy 1820-1881
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ



Conservation Officer Jim Henry, ravaged forest - 1990. Photo: NZ Herald

After over a century of browsing by introduced possums and wallabies the forests on Rangitoto were on the point of collapse. Commencing in 1990 the Department of Conservation carried out a 10 year programme to remove these pests from Rangitoto Island and neighbouring Motutapu.



Conservation Officer Jim Henry, restored forest - 2000. Photo: NZ Herald

pohutukawa and northern rata. Many epiphytes such as astelias, and kohurangi or Kirk's daisy, which normally clamber over the high branches of trees, grow from the ground on Rangitoto.

Wildlife

In pre-European times Rangitoto is said to have been a reserve for kaka, New Zealand's native parrot. Today fantails, grey warblers, silvereyes, tui, tomtits and moreporks are among the birds that inhabit the Rangitoto forest. In general there are fewer bush birds than might be expected – probably because the newly developed forests don't yet carry a lot of food types and thus have restricted biodiversity. Thousands of black-back gulls build their nests across the broken scoria fields, and there are two major colonies on the island. Other seabirds such as shags and terns are also common.

Possums and wallabies were introduced to Motutapu Island from Australia in the late 1800s. From Motutapu they quickly invaded Rangitoto. The combination of possums browsing the forest canopy and wallabies browsing the lower forest tiers caused significant damage to Rangitoto's vegetation. By the 1980s, they were threatening to destroy the rare pohutukawa forest. To counter this threat the Department of Conservation completed a major ten year long pest eradication programme in 1999, removing both possums and wallabies. The vegetation communities on Rangitoto are now threatened by the expansion of invasive weeds such as Spanish heath, rhamnus, pines and gorse. Efforts are being made to control and/or eradicate many of these serious plant pests.

Walks and Highlights

Walks begin at Rangitoto, Islington Bay and Yankee Wharves. Walking times are based on an average to slow pace, and will vary with different levels of fitness.

MAIN SUMMIT WALKING TRACKS

SUMMIT TRACK

Time: 1 hour one way from Rangitoto Wharf. Distance: 2 kilometres

The shortest and most popular route to the summit begins at Rangitoto Wharf and climbs through lava fields and forest to the peak at 259 metres above sea level. A few hundred metres from the start, you will notice a large flat clearing. This was made by prison labour in the 1930s and was the planned site of five tennis courts and

a pavilion (they never eventuated owing to lack of finance). Rest stops and descriptive interpretation signs are sited along the track. The summit gives panoramic views of Auckland and the Hauraki Gulf. At the summit another track circles the rim of the crater.

LAVA CAVES TRACK

Time: 15 min from Summit Track, 60 min from Wharf one way. 1 hr 45 min wharf – lava caves – Summit Road – Summit

This short diversion off the Summit Track leads to lava tunnels and caves. These are formed when the outer surface of a lava flow cools and solidifies, enclosing a tongue of still-moving lava inside. As the inner fluid lava drains away, the outer shell is left as a cave or tunnel. Return to Summit Track or the Summit Road via the signposted track.

WILSON PARK TRACK

Time: 1 hr 45 min from Wharf to summit. 45 minutes from Summit Track turn-off to Summit

This alternative route to the summit branches off the Summit Track before the Lava Caves Track turnoff. Wilson was an Englishman who planned to create a botanical park on Rangitoto in 1915, and introduced such exotic plants as cacti, figs, and pawpaws. Two remaining lava pillars on either side of the track were to have been the 'Park' gates.

SHORT WALKS -from Rangitoto Wharf

KOWHAI GROVE

Time: 45 min round trip

This short walk leads to a small kowhai grove, especially attractive in spring when the trees are flowering.

KIDNEY FERN GLEN

Time: 45 min round trip

A track branching off the Summit Track leads through a glen of delicate, translucent kidney ferns, at their best after rain.



Start of Summit Track- from Rangitoto Wharf

FLAX POINT & HISTORIC BACHES

Time: 1 hr

A coastal walk to a black-back gull breeding colony at Flax Point. Rangitoto has several nesting sites for the gulls. The gulls make their nests in the open on lava beds. Eggs are hatched in December and January. A shorter walk of about 15 minutes following the coast takes in some of the remaining historic baches.

LONGER WALKS

LIGHTHOUSE WALK TO MCKENZIE BAY

Time: 2 hr 30 min one way from Rangitoto Wharf (to Summit add 1 hr 15min)

This walk winds along the coast to McKenzie Bay, one of the two natural sand beaches on Rangitoto and a good picnic and swimming spot. (The road continues on to the summit for those who want a really long walk – add 1 hr)

RANGITOTO WHARF - SUMMIT - ISLINGTON BAY WHARF

Time: 2 hr 30 min

Take the Summit Track from Rangitoto Wharf, and at the summit follow the road down to Islington Bay. This is a good walk if you can arrange a ferry pick-up at Islington Bay – make sure you check the ferry timetable first as Islington Bay stops are seasonal.

COASTAL TRACK - RANGITOTO WHARF TO ISLINGTON BAY WHARF

Time: 2 hr 30 min

This coastal walk passes many remnants of human activity – boatsheds and baches near Rangitoto Wharf, old quarry sites, the ruins of wartime storage bases for mines, and Yankee Wharf built during World War II. Islington Bay is popular for swimming, picnicking and yacht anchorage.

RANGITOTO WHARF TO ISLINGTON BAY WHARF (INLAND)

Time: 1 hr 30 min

This alternative route to Islington Bay passes along a road built by prisoners. The road continues on over the causeway to Motutapu Island.

ISLINGTON BAY WHARF TO HOME BAY (MOTUTAPU)

Time: 1 hr 45 min one way

From Islington Bay, cross the causeway to Motutapu Island. A walk over farmland and cliff tops leads to Home Bay where a

ISLINGTON BAY ROAD TO WRECK BAY

Time: 1 hr one way

The Wreck Bay Track takes a twisting route to a bay on the northern side of Rangitoto. Wreck Bay and adjacent Boulder Bay were once used as a dumping ground for old ships. At Wreck Bay are the remains of the *Ngapuhi*, *Elinor Vernon*, *Arapawa*, and *Dartford*. Best visited at low tide.*

Nineteenth Century picnic party - Auckland Institute Museum Library



*The Rangitoto wrecks

A list of ships run aground or scuttled off Rangitoto.

[Arapawa](#)
[Clara Hargrave \(ex Achilles\)](#)
[Columbia \(Show Boat\)](#)
[Duchess \(Lady of the Gulf\)](#)
[Dartford](#)
[Elinor Vernon](#)
[Gladbrook \(ex County of Anglesea\)](#)
[Jubilee](#)
[Ngapuhi](#)
[Northern Chief](#)
[Polly \(ex Skovland\)](#)
[Rarawa](#)
[Rothsay Bay \(ex Activ\)](#)

Over the years the hulks have gradually deteriorated and been broken up by wave action - in much the same way as other shipwrecks on the sea bed break up in exposed places. Some large pieces of wreckage remain on the foreshore or in the intertidal zone at Wreck Bay, Boulder Bay, and along the adjacent coastline. In many cases it is difficult to work out which ship the wreckage has come from.

The Rangitoto hulks are now a regionally significant heritage site protected by the Auckland Regional Council and Department of Conservation. Please do not remove or disturb any of the remains.

