Discover Kōwhai Park self-guided walk

Nau mai, haere mai

This self-guided walk starts from the entrance at the right-hand side of the car park, past the historic lime kilns and follows a looping path through native bush.

Please remember to use the kauri dieback spray stations as you enter and leave the park.

'Take nothing but memories, leave nothing but footprints'

'Haria ko ngā maharatanga anake,waiho ko ngā tapuae anake'.

Local history and lime kilns

The area known today as Warkworth was once called Puhinui. The waterfalls at the head of the Mahurangi River, in the centre of town, are called the Puhinui Falls. They are wāhi tapu, being of significance to Ngāti Manuhiri. Historically this forested inland area was utilised for many resources, for example snaring birds; gathering berries for food; collecting plants for rongoā (medicine); trapping tuna (eels), koura, kākahi (freshwater mussels) and waterfowl from the river and its tributaries; felling trees for waka; and harvesting harakeke for weaving.

Signage at the entrance to the park and above the lime kilns provides a history of the park and local area after European settlement.

The old lime kilns are classified as a protected archaeological site and a reminder of Warkworth's industrial past. They were constructed in the 1880s and used for the production of quicklime for building and slaked lime for agricultural use. Limestone that had been quarried nearby would have been loaded into the top of the kilns with alternate layers of wood or coal and left to burn, transforming it into quicklime that could be removed from the bottom of the kilns. This was used in the construction of Auckland's earliest commercial buildings. Since then, the park has taken on many guises including being used as the town's holiday park. It has undergone an amazing transformation after its period as a busy industrial area when all the surrounding trees were felled. 150 years later, the native bush has been restored with many large species thriving here.

Get to know your native trees

Rakau Rangatira	Chiefly Trees
Tū Teitei I te Wao Nui	Standing Tall in the Forest
Ki te Kore Koutou	Without you
Mā Wai e Mihi te Rā	Who will greet the Sun

Kōwhai Park is dominated by tawa and tītoki, with several large mataī, tōtara and kauri trees. The closeness of the limestone to the surface improves soil pH and encourages good root development, causing these species to thrive. The mature kōwhai trees that were once plentiful have now reached the end of their lifespan but kōwhai saplings are being planted to replace them.

The wood of tōtara, rimu, miro, mataī, kahikatea and kauri was highly valued by European settlers to make furniture, fence posts, building supports, railway sleepers, telegraph poles and much more. Traditional uses by Māori include: the soot of kahikatea heartwood used in tāmoko (traditional tattooing); the inner bark of rimu applied to burns; the gum from miro used to stop bleeding and heal ulcers; and timber from mataī and kauri used for carving.

A large tōtara is marked on the map. Tōtara are dioecious, meaning they have separate male and female trees. In autumn, the female trees produce a green seed that sits in a juicy red base, this was a valued food source for Māori. Mature tōtara take over 100 years to reach 30m tall. A tree that had been carefully selected to make a waka would have been felled using stone axes with the help of small fires set near the base of the trunk. The huge log was hollowed out with stone tools and fire, before being further shaped and carved using greenstone chisels. The forest was a spiritual place for Māori. A special ceremony would have been performed before removing a tree to give thanks to Tāne, the god of the forest.

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Volunteers and Auckland Council staff are controlling weeds in the park such as tradescantia to allow seedlings and native plants to thrive.

Look out for epiphytes

As you walk through the forest, take time to observe the different forest layers and the ways in which plants are adapted to find sunlight. Light is needed by plants to photosynthesize, the process by which plants make their own food using light energy, water and carbon dioxide. Plants that find an opening in the canopy and receive more sunlight can grow faster than others. Epiphytes and vines such as kareao (supplejack), mokimoki (fragrant fern), northern rātā and kahakaha (perching lily) climb or grow on the trunks and branches of other plants to help them reach the sunlight. For more information on the structure of conifer-broadleaf forests visit **teara.govt.nz/en/conifer-broadleaf-forests**.

Bird Watching

There are a number of benches along the track that provide lovely spots to sit quietly to observe and listen for birds. You are likely to hear the tuneful song of tūī, they have two voice boxes that enable them to produce a melody of complex ringing sounds, clicks and whistles. Pīwakawaka (fantails) have short sharp repetitive cheeping calls. Riroriro (grey warblers) are more often heard than seen – their song starts with three squeaks and then becomes a long wavering warble. You may hear the noisy chattering of eastern rosella or rainbow lorikeets. These are non-native birds originally from Australia; they threaten our native birds as they compete with them for food and nest sites. At night you would likely to hear the sound of ruru (morepork).

Visit **doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds** to listen to birdcalls and **nzbirdsonline.org.nz** is a great tool for helping to identify what you see.

What's living in the stream?

The bridges near the entrances to the park and the flat area near the stream on the lower track are good places to spot creatures living in the stream. Plants keep the stream shaded and cool, and their roots help prevent soil erosion and silt building up in the water. Stream-dwelling animals need cool, clear, clean water to survive. Cool flowing water has more oxygen dissolved in it, which is beneficial to the animals living in it. Murky or polluted water can clog up the gills of freshwater insects and fish.

How you can help look after Kōwhai Park

On your way back to the park entrance you might like to stop and reflect on the things you've discovered and discussed on your walk today, including how people can help to protect the biodiversity of forest and stream ecosystems. One important way to protect and increase the number of our native species is to control pests including possums, rats, ferrets, weasels, stoats and hedgehogs; they cause havoc in forest ecosystems by eating leaves, berries, flowers, insects, snails, eggs, chicks and even adult birds. Forests with good pest control have higher populations of native animals and a greater diversity of plants. Visit **predatorfreenz.org** or **pestdetective.org.nz** to find out how you could control pests in your own backyard or join a local group to help.

Thank you for using the cleaning stations as you enter and leave the park to help protect the kauri trees from being affected by kauri dieback disease. Please stay on the tracks and stop your dog from wandering to help stop the spread of the disease. For more information visit **kauridieback.co.nz** and to find out more about kauri visit **teara.govt.nz/en/kauri-forest**.

Top tips for visiting

- This walk has been designed to take 1.5 hours at a moderate pace.
- Bring a wlidlife guide to help identify what you see.
- Insect repellent could be handy to avoid mosquito bites.

To find out how to get involved with projects within the park please email: **mylocalpark@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz**

To report a problem visit **aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/report-it** or call **09 301 0101**.

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