

The Kermadec Islands

The Kermadec Islands, lying some 1000 kilometres northeast of New Zealand, are the most remote conservation areas managed by the Auckland Department of Conservation.

The Kermadecs are a chain of islands extending some 250km along the western ridge of the Kermadec Trench, and consist of four groups of islands and rocks. Raoul Island, the largest, lies to the north of the group. The next largest is Macauley Island, about 120km south of Raoul. The rest of the group is made up of smaller islands, including Curtis and Cheeseman to the south of Macauley, isolated rocks such as the southern-most outcrop, L'Esperance Rock, and the Meyer Islands northeast of Raoul.

The islands, and much of the sea bed around them, lie on the edge of the Kermadec Trench, where the large and active Pacific Plate buries itself under the Australasian Plate. The whole area is volcanically active, and earthquakes are an almost daily occurrence. The islands are the summits of young, steep-sided volcanoes, which rise some 8000 metres from the sea floor. Raoul Island last erupted in 1964.

The Kermadecs enjoy a mild and subtropical climate. About 1500mm of rain falls each year. Cyclones occasionally wreak havoc.

The Kermadecs are uninhabited apart from Raoul Island, where the Department of Conservation maintains a staffed station. Staff and volunteers undertake a range of tasks, including weather observation, weed control, reserve and facilities maintenance, and monitoring volcanic activity. As rangers, the staff also have responsibility for policing the rules of the nature and marine reserves.

The staff hostel and weather station is located on the northern terraces of Raoul. Landing normally takes place at Fishing Rock, east of the hostel site.

Permits and Regulations

Nature Reserves

All the islands of the Kermadec Group are nature reserves and cannot be visited without a landing permit from the Department of Conservation.

Raoul is the most robust of the islands, and visitor permits are available to those with a genuine interest in its natural and cultural history. The other islands are extremely fragile, and cannot withstand even low numbers of visitors. Permits to land are only given to people for work which will assist either the management or understanding of the island's ecosystems.

Marine Reserve

The waters around all the islands and rocks, out to the edge of the Territorial Sea (12 nautical miles) are a marine reserve. All marine life is totally protected.

- All fishing and other extractive activities are prohibited.
- Activities that interfere with or disturb marine life are also prohibited.
- Vessels visiting the islands may anchor if they exercise care.
- It is an offence to discharge any toxic pollutant or rubbish into the reserve.
- Offences can attract heavy fines and/or imprisonment, and seizure of vessels.

For information, permits and research enquiries contact:

Department of Conservation
Warkworth Area Office

Ph 09-425 7812 (office hours)

Auckland Conservancy Office
Private Bag 68 908 Newton, Auckland
New Zealand

Tel 0064-9-307 9279

Fax 0064-9-377 2919

Published by the Department of Conservation
Auckland Conservancy June 2002



Kermadec Islands Nature Reserves & Marine Reserve

Visitor and Permit Information



Cover
photograph:
Raoul Island,
Denham Bay,
M.Ambrose



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Kermadec Nature Reserve

Most of the Kermadec Islands were gazetted a nature reserve in 1934, one of the highest forms of protection an area can be given under New Zealand law. This status recognises the special, fragile nature of the island's plants and animals.

The islands are still mainly covered in their natural vegetation, although Raoul is the only forested island. Here, Kermadec pohutukawa and mapou dominate the drier coastal areas below 250m. Above, in a moister zone, pohutukawa remains, but mapou gives way to hutu. In places, large, almost pure stands of nikau can be found, which add to the other-worldliness of these mist-shrouded highlands.

The Kermadec's isolation means that many rare and unusual species have developed. Twenty-three species or subspecies of plant are endemic to the islands, and 12 are threatened with, or are vulnerable to, extinction in their natural environment. Of the 35 species of birds known on the islands, five are found nowhere else in the world.

Although they still retain their essential natural character, the islands have suffered major changes through the introduction of weeds and pests. Goats which were liberated on Raoul and Macauley as emergency food for shipwrecked sailors have been eradicated. Cats and rats were introduced as well thus preventing successful nesting by the majority of seabirds.

Weeds also pose problems. Mysore thorn was introduced from Asia by early European settlers to keep the goats out of their gardens. A vigorous and thorny plant, it climbs over the native forest and forms a dense, smothering canopy. If not controlled, this and other exotic plants like passionfruit could destroy the natural character of the Raoul Island forest.

Raoul Island, the only island in the Kermadecs with water, was visited and settled by early Polynesian voyagers. A



Pohutukawa/Nikau
Forest,
M'Ambrose

succession of European settlers attempted to live there between the 1850s and the 1930s but were usually thwarted by climatic conditions, the isolation, or volcanic activity. There are a number of protected archaeological and historic sites on the island.

Kermadec Marine Reserve

This is New Zealand's largest marine reserve, created in November 1990. It extends 12 nautical miles from the cliffs and boulder beaches of the various islands and rocks, out to the edge of the territorial sea. The marine reserve is large even by world standards, and covers 745,000 ha or 7450 square km.

The Kermadecs marine environment provides important links between the temperate waters of mainland New Zealand and tropical waters. The marine reserve extends from shallow waters in-habited by the rare spotted black grouper to the deeper areas of the Kermadec Trench (3000m plus), making it representative of the local marine ecosystems.

Corals do occur around these islands, but do not form reefs, as elsewhere in the Pacific. Large plate corals are formed which are fragile, and easily damaged. Endemic marine fishes and giant limpets occur in the marine reserve.

The waters immediately around Raoul Island are shallow (up to 40 metres), so it is possible to anchor within the marine reserve. Care should be taken to ensure minimum damage to marine life.

Fishing and extractive activities are not allowed within the marine reserve. Fines of up to \$250,000 and/or six months' imprisonment may apply under the Marine Reserves Act 1971.

The rare spotted black grouper and Kermadec red and black corals are protected under the Wildlife Act. It is illegal to hunt, kill, possess or sell these marine wildlife, with penalties of up to six months imprisonment or a \$250,000 fine.

