

Waipapa Loop Walk



Introduction

The Waipapa Loop Walk in Pureora Forest Park takes 30 minutes to complete - although if you really want to appreciate the special features of the area and spend time listening for birds, allow around one hour. The walk is accessible to people of most ages and fitness levels but is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs.

Access is next to Pureora Forest Park Lodge off Gully Road on the northern side of State Highway 30. If the road gate is locked, allow an extra 10 minutes to walk along the road to the start of the track. There are numbered posts at points of interest along the walk and this factsheet describes what you might see or hear at those posts. Keep to the marked loop track, following the orange triangles. Other coloured markers are for management purposes and should not be followed.



Background

Pureora Forest Park preserves the last remnants of extensive native podocarp forests that once covered most of the central North Island. It wasn't always protected and between 1930 to the early 1970s, sections of the forest were logged to provide timber for large state housing projects. Exotic trees were also planted for future timber needs. The forest around the lodge was never milled but designated as an ecological area and is now the basis of a wonderful forest experience along the Waipapa Loop Walk.

Track guide

Before starting the walk, stop in the grassy area at the lodge and look north to where you will be walking for a good view of the forest structure. Immediately in front of you is a regenerating shrubland of *Dracophyllum subulatum* (monoao), *Pittosporum colensoi*, *Coprosma virescens* and *Coprosma tayloriae*. Beyond these is a *Pseudopanax crassifolius* (lancewood) and *Phyllocladus alpinus* (mountain toatoa) dominated layer and, emerging above them, are the forest giants - rimu, totara, miro and matai with occasional kahikatea and tanekaha.

1 Fernbird

This area of shrubland and grasses is located within a frost flat - a low altitude pocket where cold air ponds and frosts are not uncommon in summer. Vegetation is slow growing and specialised but over time, is likely to revert to podocarp forest.

Listen out for fernbird (matata). More often heard than seen, fernbirds are sparrow-sized brown birds found in either dense, low wet vegetation or in dry shrubland at Pureora. They are poor flyers and tend to scramble through the vegetation making a "u-tick" sound



2 Lancewood

On entering the forest, there is now a greater variety of trees and shrubs. This is an ideal nursery with good light and overhead protection provided by canopy trees. Key species here are koromiko, mountain toatoa and lancewood. The foliage of the lancewood changes dramatically as the tree matures. Juveniles have a very straight thin trunk and cluster of long leaves that hang down. Adult leaves are much smaller and form a crown at the top of the tree.



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Podocarps

Podocarps are a type of conifer that evolved during the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods (190-65 million years ago) when New Zealand was part of Gondwanaland. Meaning 'seed with a foot', podocarps do not bear flowers. The seed cone sits at the end of a fleshy stalk as found on kahikatea (pictured right) or is contained within a large berry like the miro and matai. Their leaves are linear or scale-like.

New Zealand's forest giants - *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides* (kahikatea), *Prumnopitys ferruginea* (miro), *Prumnopitys taxifolia* (matai), *Dacrydium cupressinum* (rimu) and *Podocarpus totara* (totara) are podocarps.



3 Kahikatea

The forest composition changes again with damper conditions and cooler temperatures as the forest canopy closes to create a tunnel effect. There are mosses everywhere, with plants like astelia and ground ferns along with seedlings of rimu, kahikatea and matai.

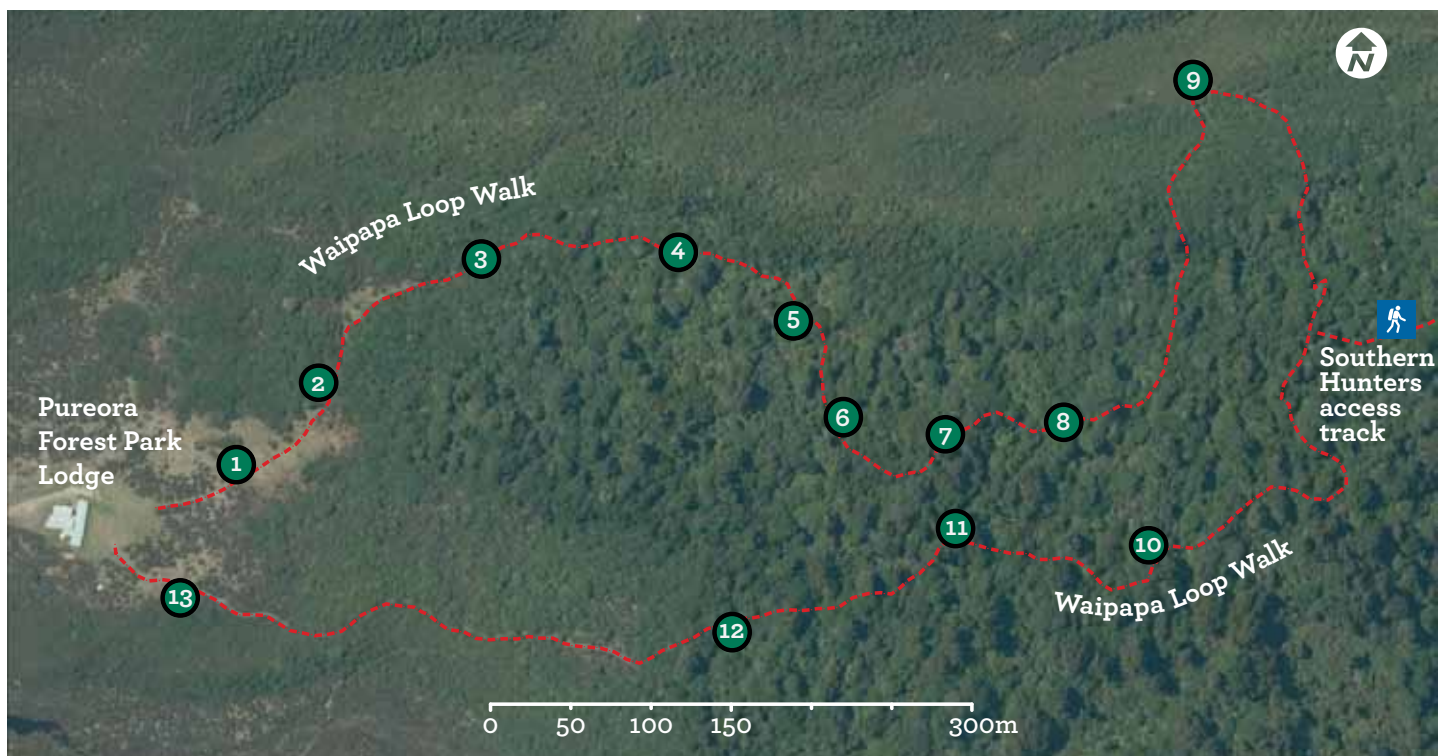
Kahikatea could eventually grow to over 60 m. A buttressed trunk and flaky grey bark are distinctive features of the adult kahikatea (one can be seen near post 7). The buttresses give the tree support in swampy habitat. The small red and blue berries were traditionally eaten by Māori.



4 Tree Ferns

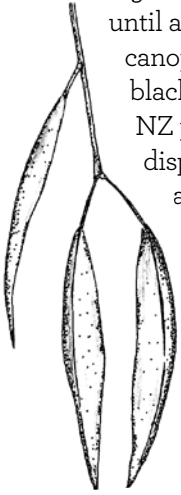
This is an area of abundant ferns with three species of tree ferns present. You can recognise the wheki ponga (*Dicksonia fibrosa*) by the dead fronds clinging to the trunk to form a skirt. On the katote (*Cyathea smithii*) the dead fronds resemble ribs without flesh while the wheki (*Dicksonia squarrosa*) loses its old fronds but you can see where they have been by the broken surface of the trunk.

Ferns do not have flowers or seeds, instead they produce spores. Look for brown spots or lines on the underside of fern fronds. These are known as sori and contain thousands of minute spores - each with potential to grow into a new fern.



5 Tawa

A large tawa stands beside the track with its smooth trunk and long slender leaves. Tawa was not present in this area until after the Taupo eruption but is now a dominant canopy species along with hinau. Its dark purple/black fleshy fruit of 2-3 cm is a favourite of the NZ pigeon (kuku or kereru). The kuku is able to disperse the large seeds of trees like miro, taraire and tawa. You may hear the whoosh of kuku's beating wings as it flies through the forest.



6 Rotting log

The large fallen matai log is now the foundation for a new 'cityscape' of plant growth - mosses, liverworts, ferns and tree seedlings. It is one of many fallen trees in the forest that is going through a natural cycle of decay and returning essential elements to the soil. Beetles, termites, insects and fungi have all made it their home, adding to the gradual decomposition of the timber.

Just past the marker post, is a big rimu with its unmistakable drooping foliage (look for it on the ground beneath the tree) but if you move on to post 7, there are even more big trees to be seen.



7 Forest giants

Here you can see five species of podocarps in the one area. To your right is another large rimu and to the left of that, a tall totara recognisable by the stringy, deeply furrowed bark. Straight ahead on the track is a miro and to your left, a number of matai. Matai has grey-brown 'beaten' bark which flakes off leaving reddish blotches on the trunk. A tall kahikatea with its distinctive buttress base is behind you back along the track.



8 Forest birds

This is a good place to come early in the morning (before sunrise) for a chance of hearing kokako and maybe even catching sight of this elusive bird (but don't wander off the track). Kokako have



a unique appearance with bluish-grey feathers, long legs and tail, short wings and bright blue 'wattles' on either side of their beak. Their haunting song is very distinctive.

Other forest birds with a melodious song are tui and bellbird. The shiny black tui has a striking tuft of white feathers at its throat while the bellbird is smaller with olive green colouring. Both birds have similar songs with pure, bell-like tones. They can be hard to tell apart, but the tui intersperses its song with various clicks and wheezes.

9 North Island kaka

From the open point above the Waipapa Stream, you may see flocks of falcons or kaka flying across the valley or high up in the forest canopy. Kaka feed on fruit, flowers, nectar and insects, using their strong beak, claws and bristly tongue. Kaka make harsh ka-aa cries.



There are views west across the valley to a regenerating forest of mountain toatoa, tawa, rimu and totara. Mountain toatoa and tanekaha are in the same plant family (*Phyllocladus*) and at first glance, look similar. At post 9 there are young of both species (tanekaha on the right) to be able to see the difference in colour and shape of the flattened branchlets or phylloclades. These replace leaves.

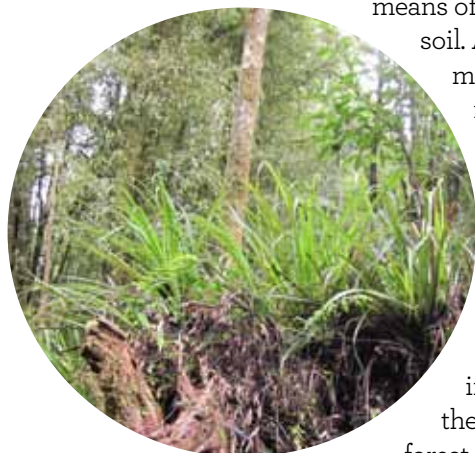


Note: Between posts 9 and 10 you will pass a sign with the words 'Southern hunters access'. This indicates a tramping track used by experienced trampers and hunters. Do not turn onto this track but continue along the loop walk.

10 Perching plants

Epiphyte is the collective name for perching plants (which include ferns, orchids, shrubs and herbs) that grow on other plants but derive no nutrients from them. They receive good light high in the tree tops and have evolved

means of storing water in lieu of soil. Also known as 'widow makers', epiphytes can fall to the ground with dramatic effect especially after heavy wind and rain. You can see some of these plants on the windfalls lying on the ground, the gaps in the canopy allowing the light to reach the forest floor. Seedlings also proliferate in these conditions.



11 North Island robin

With a good covering of leaf litter on the ground, you may have the chance of observing small birds such as fantail (piwakawaka) and the NI robin (piitoitoi) - if you haven't seen them already along the walk. These little birds often come close to humans hoping that insects may be disturbed for food. The NI Robin is dark grey with paler grey breast and tends to blend in with its surroundings, although their loud repetitive metallic chirp warning other birds of your approach will give them away.



Note the large rimu with the trunk dividing into several arms well above the ground. Such oddities can often be found in the forest, possibly due to environmental conditions in early years of growth.

Alseuosmia pusilla (pictured) also grows at post 11 and looks very similar to horopito (*Pseudowintera colorata*) but without the peppery tasting leaves.



12 Divaricating shrubs

A feature of our native forests is the number of shrubs with a twiggly, tangled (divaricating) appearance with small leaves. Often they are the juvenile form of taller trees, changing into a larger-leaved adult e.g., kaikomako and putaputaweta. However, many plants keep their divaricating form - small-leaved copromas being one. Coprosmas have a characteristic notch (stipule) on the stem between opposite pairs of leaves. In this location you can see *Coprosma rhamnoides*, *Melicope simplex*, *Raukaua anomalus* and *Neomyrtus pedunculata* (rohutu).



13 Exotic plants

As you leave the forest and enter a more open, sunny area, introduced plants start to intrude, in particular, the pink or white flowering erica (Spanish heath) which is almost impossible to control, as are the introduced grasses interdispersed between the native tussock *Poa cita* and pimelea. Broom is slowly being eradicated but is a long-term commitment. A consequence of human visitation is the number of seedling apple trees that sprout around the lodge. Apple trees are a 'weed' in this location so please don't throw away that apple core but put it back in your lunch box and take home with you.

Toitu te whenu - *Leave the land undisturbed.*



Published by:
Department of Conservation
78 Taupiri Street
P O Box 38, Te Kuiti 3941
Phone 07 878 1050
Fax 07 878 1051
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Suggestions for corrections or
improvements can be emailed to:
tekuiti@doc.govt.nz