

Pohutukawa in North Taranaki

Prepared for Project Crimson
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Waitara

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Aim

To establish if and where there are any naturally occurring pohutukawa *Metrosideros excelsa* in North Taranaki.

Methods

(A) FIELD SURVEY

A field survey from Waitara to the Awakino river mouth was carried out over eight days in November 1994. Any pohutukawa found were described and the likelihood of them being natural was established.

(B) HISTORICAL RECORDS

Records at the Taranaki Museum, Alexander Turnbull Library and the New Plymouth Public Library were searched. A list of all publications or manuscripts examined is appended.

(C) PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs of the North Taranaki coastal area from Waitara to Awakino were searched for in collections at the Taranaki Museum, Alexander Turnbull Library and the Tainui Settlers Museum.

(D) PREVIOUS BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS AND PUBLICATIONS

Information in previous biological surveys was sorted and summarised.

(E) ORAL KNOWLEDGE OF POHUTUKAWA IN AREA

Many people were interviewed about their knowledge of pohutukawa within the study area, during the course of this work. Older people were targeted and an article appeared in the "Daily News" asking for information. A poster was also put up in shops in the area from New Plymouth to Awakino.

(F) HERBARIUM SPECIMENS

I checked with herbaria at Landcare Research, Lincoln (CHR), Museum of New Zealand at Wellington (WELT) and Auckland Museum (AK) for collections of pohutukawa from Taranaki. None of these have any records of collections having been made.

Results

(A) FIELD SURVEY/INFORMATION FROM CONVERSATIONS

A summary of the field survey and the information gained from talking to people is attached as Appendix One. There are high numbers of pohutukawa occurring within this area, most of which are either obviously planted or have seeded from planted material. If there were any doubts about whether they were planted or not, I checked to see if the landowners had any information about their origins.

Two things emerged from the field survey - the first was the absence of pohutukawa from areas of suitable habitat - i.e. areas of semi-natural vegetation adjacent to the coast. The second was the popularity of pohutukawa for planting and the high amount of interest in the tree from the people who live in the North Taranaki area.

Possibly four naturally occurring trees, or groups of trees, were found during the survey and these are described in detail below.

(B) HISTORICAL DIARIES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

None of the earliest historical descriptions of the vegetation included any description of pohutukawa nor did any of the diaries from this area. The historic photos were most useful for identifying areas that lacked pohutukawa - e.g. Mokau, Urenui, Tongaporutu, Wai-iti and Awakino.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS/PUBLICATIONS

- (a) Kirk (1889) in "The Forest Flora of New Zealand" lists the southern limit of pohutukawa as being the banks of the Mimi River.
- (b) Allan (1961) and Cheeseman (1906) list Urenui as the southern limit.

- (c) Clarkson and Boase (1982) state the southern most pohutukawa as being "near to the Pukearuhe Scenic Reserve."

In their report - the "Biological Survey of Reserves in Western Taranaki", Clarkson and Boase (1982) give descriptions of seven areas of coastal and semi-coastal reserves. These are: Te Urenui Pa, Pukearuhe Historic and Scenic Reserves, Onaero Scenic Reserve, Okoki Historic Reserve, Pou Tehia Historic Reserve and Te Kawau Pa Historic Reserve. In the description of Te Urinui Historical Reserve, pohutukawa (presumably seedlings) were recorded in 1979. No other records of pohutukawa occur in any of these reserves, except at Pukearuhe Historic Reserve where the trees are described as being planted.

- (d) In their report of the Protected Natural Areas Survey for North Taranaki Ecological District, Bayfield et al. (1991) cover the area from just south of Urenui to north of Awakino, and describe 10 areas of coastal/semi-coastal forest:

Awakino Dunes, Titirangi, Paharoa, Mokau river scenic reserves extensions, Te Puia, Kuwhatahi, Waikiekie, Pukatea, Okoki and Urenui River mouth.

None of the descriptions of these areas include pohutukawa. The report lists the southern limit of pohutukawa as being at Pukearuhe. The reference cited is Druce, A P and Ogle, C C (1972) "Indigenous vascular plants of Whitecliffs area near Pukearuhe."

POSSIBLE/PROBABLE NATURALLY OCCURRING TREES

(a) Paparoa Reef (between Wai-iti and Mimi rivers) [NZMSI N99 010060]

On the cliffs inland from the Paparoa mussel reef, there are eight small clumps of pohutukawa trees. The tallest of these would be approximately 10 m high. There are about 15 trees 8-10 m high and numerous seedlings and smaller trees. The age of these trees is very difficult to judge because of the extreme growing conditions. The branchlets are much thicker than on the trees growing in the open, and the leaves were closer together. They have the narrow, short leaves of the planted tree at Pukearuhe.

The trees are growing on an extremely steep, north-facing sea cliff (formed by erosion of an uplifted marine terrace). These cliffs are approximately 30 m tall. They curve inland from the sea at this point and appear to have more soil on them and be slightly more sheltered than elsewhere along the coast. In one place the trees go down to just above the beach and there had been a small slip in this area in the winter of 1994. The main native species growing with the trees are taupata, kawakawa, karaka and flax with occasional karo. The cliffs are extremely unstable, and there have been three quite large slips between Mimi and Wai-iti in 1994. More trees grew here until the recent major slip. There was also foot access to the beach down the cliffs in recent times, but this has eroded away.

There is evidence of some possum damage to these trees. The land behind the trees has been cleared for farming. It is fenced to approximately 1 m from the cliff top.

Access to the trees is either through the farm along the cliff top (Mr and Mrs Newton, off Pukearuhe Road) or along the beach from Wai-iti Motor Camp at low tide.

These trees are known locally as being "the most southern naturally occurring trees". Local people said that they had been there as long as they could remember and had always been about the same height. They were known to have smaller leaves and to flower less profusely than the other planted pohutukawa.

This information came from Howard Penwarden (86 years old), Jim Matuku (75 years old), Jim Phillips and Des Glassford. The last-named said that they had been there as long as his father (Matt Glassford, 92 years old) could remember. Matt Glassford has lived in this area all his life, but unfortunately he was too ill to interview.

Marge Rau-Kupa (Ngati Mutunga) remembers these trees as being there when she was young and recognises them as being the only trees within the Ngati Mutunga rohe - her understanding is that they have been there for many generations and are "ancient".

Mr Jim Phillips, who used to own the adjoining farm, had talked to Jack McClutchie (Ngati Mutunga Kaumatua) about the trees and he was told that according to Ngati Mutunga tradition, these trees were planted by people from the Tokomaru waka when they stopped at this spot to repair their waka. The Tokomaru had come via the Kermadec Islands from where the trees were supposed to have been collected. This was confirmed by other members of the McClutchie family (Davis McClutchie, Pukearuhe and Stephen McClutchie, Waitara) and was also confirmed with other Ngati Mutunga kaumatua.

There are no old planted trees nearby from which these could have obviously spread.

Trees taken from this area have been planted at Wai-iti on Whakarewa pa (according to Des Glassford), on a farm on the main road at Waitoitoi (according to Harold Penwarden), at the McClutchie homestead on the Mimi Stock Route and along the main road further north. Davis McClutchie also said that he collected seedlings from the one at his father's house and has planted these on the sea cliffs at his farm on Pukearuhe Road.

There is a similar, small leaved tree adjacent to Pukearuhe road by the Mimi river. This tree appears to be quite old, but may have been planted as it is near the old Mimi river crossing (1860s) and an old house site.

(b) *Wai-iti Beach Camp [NZMS1 N99 024083]*

On the left side of the Wai-iti beach camp there is a large pohutukawa growing back from the cliff, behind a small cottage.

Access to this area used to be via a track up from the beach. Jim Matuku and Steve White remember this tree being tall when they were young and estimate it to be as old as the one at Pukearuhe. Jim Matuku remembers coming here via the cliff path when he was a teenager, and there being a large tree with seedlings around it.

The tree has the same narrow and short leaves as those at Mimi and Pukearuhe but is much larger, approximately 18 m tall and has a girth of over 8 m. It is in a much more sheltered place than any of the others examined and is growing in fairly good soil. There have been pohutukawa and karo planted here more recently.

This tree may have been planted. There are five pa sites in the immediate vicinity and there was a military redoubt here in the 1860s. The tree is immediately behind a house whose age has not been determined.

No early photographs of this area have been found.

There are no apparent threats to this tree.

(c) Pukearuhe Pa Site [NZMS1 N99 058124]

There is one tree approximately 10 m tall with a girth of 5 m remaining on the top of this pa site, approximately 10 m from the cliff edge. It has similar narrow and short leaves to those of the trees at Wai-iti and Paparoa.

The tree is growing on a plateau adjacent to a steep sea cliff formed by erosion of the edge of an uplifted marine terrace. The area behind the cliff has been cleared and developed for farmland.

This area was formerly a Paa site and later a military camp and the terraces and earthworks from these times are still evident. There has been some die-back in the top of the tree, possibly from possum damage. The reserve is leased for grazing and there is evidence of damage caused by stock rubbing against the tree trunk.

This area is reserved as a Historic Reserve and is administered by the Department of Conservation.

This area was an important Ngati Tama pa site and later was occupied by Government Military forces from 1865 to 1885. This led to a great amount of information about the area, in diaries, books, photographs and paintings. Despite this, it has been impossible to establish whether or not this tree was planted.

When the pa site was occupied by the military it was described as being covered in "scrub and light bush". There is a good photograph of this Pukearuhe settlement taken in 1865 before the Block house was built, which shows the area now occupied by the tree in the far left corner - no big trees are obvious although there are a few that are as high as the houses. There are numerous paintings of this area, none of which show large trees.

According to Mr Penwarden (who lived here when he was young and whose mother was born here) the tree is beside the site of Mr Messenger's house. There are photos of this house in the Taranaki Museum but no tree is obvious.

However, the present tree is thought to be very old by people who remember it from their youth. According to Mr Penwarden (who is 86) his mother, who was born in 1886, told him that she was born under this tree. She lived here when she was young as she was the daughter of Mr Gilbert the Sergeant in Charge of the camp and she lived in what was the Camp Commandant's house. Mr Penwarden said he can remember his sister sitting in her pram under the tree when he lived there in 1912. He remembers it as being a large tree then. Mrs J Vickery said that according to her mother who attended the Pukearuhe School (established 1882) that this tree was used by the pupils of the school as a shade tree. Steve White and Jim Matuku also remember it from when they were children in the 1920s and it being a large tree then, which they were able to climb.

Other trees in this area:

There were 12 pohutukawa trees planted in the Historic Reserve by the Lands and Survey Department in 1969. These came from Duncan and Davies Nursery (Department of Conservation file, 13/183). Up the hill from the pa site, on farms owned by the Bryants and the Keegans, there are several very tall pohutukawa. None of these have the small narrow leaves or (according to Mrs Bryant) the same coloured flowers as the tree on the pa site. Four of these trees are taller than the one on the pa site, but were probably planted when these farms were established and are growing in more favourable conditions. Two of the trees in the line on the right of the Bryants' house were collected from Whakatane and were planted approximately 35 years ago (Mrs Bryant, pers. comm.).

(d) Rapanui Area [NZMS1 N100 140246]

In the area surrounding Te Kawau station, there are approximately 15 trees growing on the hills to the east of the main road. The trees occur on the sea-facing slopes and also on the inland-facing slopes. There are also two trees growing on the edge of the sea cliffs.

The trees are up to 8 m tall and are obviously not planted. However, there are some taller trees planted behind the station house on the west side of the main road, from which these trees could have seeded.

The Rapanui trees have slightly more rounded leaves than the ones at Mimi, Wai-iti and Pukearuhe. I feel that they have most likely spread from the trees planted behind the house site but this site needs more investigation.

Conclusions

The trees on the cliff adjacent to Paparoa reef are most urgently in need of conservation because the site is so unstable. They are also the trees growing in the most natural situation and are least likely to have been recently planted or to have seeded from planted trees.

These trees, and the ones at Pukearuhe and Wai-iti, all have a characteristic small, narrow leaf and according to local people, similar coloured flowers. They are also known to flower more sparsely and grow more slowly than the introduced pohutukawa, obtained from nurseries.

The question of whether or not these trees originally came from ones planted by Ngati Mutunga from the Kermadecs via the Tokomaru waka, may need further study.

Ngati Tama have expressed interest in the tree on Pukearuhe being propagated and the Department may wish to help with this.

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Appendix One:

SUMMARY OF FIELD OBSERVATIONS/ CONVERSATIONS

This is arranged North to South.

Awakino Township

River bank plantings, up to 8 m, large round leaves and some garden escapes up to 2 m.

NB: Photos of Awakino town from 1920s - no trees whatsoever (Tainui Settlers Museum).

There was no sign of trees on either side of the Awakino heads.

Fraser Heads Road

Many planted around houses up to 8 m and small garden escapes. None along main road.

Motor Camp and along beach

Plantings around motor camp - up to 3 m. Grove approximately 100 m along beach, 8 m, large round leaves.

Tea Rooms to Mokau

Garden plantings and roadside escapes up to 12 m.

Mokau township

Many plantings up to about 12 m. Photographic records show that there were very few trees in Mokau in the 1920s (Tainui Settlers Museum). People from Mokau say that the existing trees were planted in the early 1920s.

Road up Mokau River

None seen at all on both sides of river - none recorded in any previous surveys of this area.

Mokau to Mohakatino

Land behind cliffs is cleared on both sides of the main road. There is a large area of forest behind the cliffs to the east of the main road (described by Bayfield et al. 1991). Some patches of puriri and karaka occur adjacent to the main road and there is a swamp at the mouth of the Mohakatino River (described by Bayfield et al. 1991). The only pohutukawa are roadside plantings and some tall trees (10 m) behind houses.

Access to beach is available along this area from the road to the mussel reef by the Hokaui River. The beach is accessible along from just south of the Mokau river mouth to the Mohakatino river mouth at low tide. The cliffs here are not as tall as further south and are more stable. There are several older taupata trees here - some going down to the beach edge, along with flax. No seedlings of pohutukawa were seen.

Mohakatino to Te Kawau Pa

Land cleared from inward hills to cliffs edge. There are 8 m high pohutukawa planted along roads, which have spread back up hill and also down to the cliff edge. They have wide and long leaves and along the cliff edge they have reached 1.5 m and grow amongst the flax and taupata.

Access is not available along the beach even at low tide and the cliffs here are more eroded than further north. The only vegetation is flax and taupata along the very top of the cliffs, the rest of the cliffs are eroded clay.

Area around Te Kawau Pa

No naturally occurring pohutukawa were found during this survey or recorded during by Bayfield et al. (1991) or by the previous survey of this reserve. There are planted pohutukawa by the house beside the road and seedlings are spreading down the bank.

Te Kawau Station

See description above.

Rapanui Stream mouth

None - too steep along beach - taupata and flax only and cliffs very eroded.

Rapanui to Tongaporutu

Road site plantings only - up to 10 m tall.

Hutuwai Road

Large area of semi-coastal forest (described by Bayfield et al. 1991) - no sign of any pohutukawa.

Tongaporutu to end of Clifton Road

No pohutukawa at river mouth. There is a small area of puriri and karaka forest along Clifton Road. Pohutukawa have been planted here (approximately 50 years ago, round, long leaves) according to Victor Gibbs - there are approximately 20 trees up to 12 m tall planted in a semi-circle on the land between Clifton Road and the sea cliff.

None seen south of last line of cliff plantings on the McKenzie property (planted with flax and karo). These were planted from seedlings obtained from Waitara plantings, according to Mrs McKenzie.

Clifton Road to Stock Tunnel

According to Mrs McKenzie who has lived here all her life, she had never seen any pohutukawa in this area. This is confirmed by Mr Penwarden and by early photos of this area. No trees were found during this survey.

The cliffs are very steep and eroded and only have flax and taupata along the top. There is no access along beach even at low tide, but a good view along the cliffs is available from the Walkway. There are some remnants of forest between the walkway and the hills behind the cliff plain, mainly puriri and karaka.

Paraninihi to Pukearuhe

This is the largest area of forest adjoining the coast in the study area. No pohutukawa were found during this survey and none are known to have been recorded previously in the forest area.

The only report of trees from this area is from someone who thought they had seen one from a fishing boat (this may have been a confusion with a rata) and from Mr Penwarden who had been told that there were some in the flat area of bush behind the stock tunnel. None were found during this survey, or during a check made in January 1995 when any trees should have been flowering.

Mr Bryant also reported that there used to be a pohutukawa in the farmland at the Pukearuhe end of the walkway, but it died when the pipeline was put through.

Pukearuhe to Wai-iti

Some up to 10 m tall around houses - at Keegans and Bryants. These were planted 35 years ago; two are from Whakatane.

A pohutukawa tree is growing down the hill from the house and has lighter red flowers than the tree in the reserve. It was there but not large when the Bryants came 35 years ago.

Area behind sea cliffs cleared and developed into farmland. Several pohutukawa planted beside houses - some of which are quite large - up to 10 m, none found with small leaf form.

Some areas of semi-coastal forest on inland hills - mainly puriri and karaka. No pohutukawa found in these areas.

There have been pohutukawa planted along cliff, by land owners within the last 20 years.

Whakarewa pa site

This is a former Ngati Mutunga pa site that was occupied until the 1800s and was granted as a West Coast Reserve in the 1880s.

In 1930, Mr Wilkinson built a brick house (known locally as Wilkinson's castle) on the pa site and planted many trees, including pohutukawa. There are approximately 100 pohutukawa trees growing in this area now, with some up to 12 m tall. They have spread down the cliff facing the sea and there are also many trees growing just further south, around the Wai-iti beach camp.

No very large trees were found here, and there are various leaf forms, some with the narrow, short leaves as at Paparoa and Pukearuhe and some with rounder and longer leaves.

According to Jim Matuku, his father helped plant the gum and pine trees along the drive and on the pa site when the house was built, in approximately 1930. He does not remember him planting any pohutukawa at this time.

According to Des Glassford, his father told him Mr Wilkinson collected some of the trees he planted from the ones adjacent to the Paparoa reef. No information was available from the Wilkinson family.

A photograph of this site taken before the house was built on the pa site shows that there were no trees in this area at all. (Photo Taranaki Museum and Alexander Turnbull Library).

Wai-iti to Mimi

Some house and roadside plantings - up to 10 m tall.

Access along beach at low tide only, some small seedlings adjacent to river mouth. Otherwise karaka and taupata-flax scrub.

See report on Paparoa above.

Mimi River and river mouth

Area of forest along cliff banks, mainly karaka and puriri. Right bank of river mouth now cleared. No pohutukawa seen near mouth.

Beside Pukearuhe road bridge across Mimi river there is a tall and seemingly old (10-12 m) tree with small leaves. This is site of old river crossing - old painting and photos show no big tree there in 1860s and old house site so this may be planted.

Waitoetoe to Urenui

None on cliffs, some planted along cliff tops and some roadside plantings and house sites.

Mr Carr (Carrs Road) said that his family has been planting them along cliff tops since 1953 - with Kermadec and others, and with both red and yellow flowers. They have found that they now have to fence them from rabbit damage and possums. The ones in their house site were probably planted by Mr Carr's grandmother since 1914 and he thinks they came from the East Coast.

The Loveridges (also on Carrs Road) have also planted many pohutukawa along the sea coast - mainly seedlings from the one planted in their house site which is approximately 60-70 years old and has long roundish leaves.

None along forest beside Urenui River. None were ever known here, according to local people.

Urenui to Onaero

In Urenui township, some planted at school in 1948 (according to Mr P. Carr).

Some tall roadside and garden plantings, but less frequent here than further north. None seen with small leaves.

Onaero to Walau

Many plantings at Onaero, with large round leaves. These trees are in danger of being washed into sea.

There are also several trees growing amongst the trees on the road verge across the road from the Onaero Historic Reserve.

Walau to Waitara

Four planted at river mouth at Waiiau behind house site, some roadside plantings. Cliff area here is sandy etc.

Waitara

Many plantings along road in town, also large trees at Owae marae (planted), Saint Saviours (planted) and on Princess Street adjacent to Waitara High School. One or two seem to have smaller leaves, and there is a mixture of Kermadec and others planted.

New Plymouth

A great many planted in people's gardens and in park areas. Some of these have grown very tall - for example the trees on Leach Street, Manu Crescent and behind Kaweroa Park.

According to the New Plymouth District Council, the trees at Ngamotu/ Paritutu were planted in 1939 and those at Kaweroa were planted in the 1900s from nursery stock.

The only tree that I could discover the origin of was the tree on the corner of Leach and Cameron Streets which was brought back from Kawhia by the coxswain of the New Plymouth Surf Boat (Mr Thomas Inch) in 1874. This information comes from Scanlen (1968).

Appendix Two:

PEOPLE CONTACTED DURING THIS SURVEY

Tainui Historic Museum	
Ian Whitaker	Mokau
Bob Waahu	Mokau
Joy Christenson	Mokau
Mr O'Sullivan	Tongaporutu
Mr and Mrs C. McKenzie	Tongaporutu
Mr and Mrs V Gibbs	Tongaporutu
Steve White	Pukearuhe Ngati Tama
Mr Ellice	Pukearuhe
Frank and Faye Bryant	Pukearuhe
Murray Wells	Pukearuhe
Pat Wells	Pukearuhe
Davis McClutchie	Pukearuhe
Mrs Besley	Wai-iti
T. Wilkinson	Wai-iti (now New Plymouth)
Des Glassford	Urenui
Mrs Newton	Urenui
Jim Matuku	Urenui Ngati Mutunga
Jean Matuku	Urenui Ngati Mutunga
Mr and Mrs P Carr	Urenui
Shona Wright	Urenui
Jim Campbell	Onaero
Jim Phillips	Onaero
Peter Winter	Waitara
Stephen McClutchie	Waitara
Hip Fenton	Waitara
Jim O'Carroll	Waitara Otaraua Haapu
Howard Penwarden	New Plymouth (from Pukearuhe)
Marge Rau-Kupa	New Plymouth Ngati Mutunga
Alan Jellyman	New Plymouth District Council
Paul Jamieson	New Plymouth District Council
Ron Lambert	Taranaki Museum
May Ford	Taranaki Museum
Maggie Bayfield	
Fiona Clark	Waitara
Jocelyn Vickery	Tikorangi
Felix Jury	Tikorangi
Duncan and Davies	
Chris Vietch	New Plymouth
Audrey Eagle	New Plymouth