

# Waipoua Forest Lookout Tower

## Historic Heritage Assessment

Kauri Coast Area Office

Melina Goddard  
2010



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

Waipoua Forest Lookout Tower: Historic Heritage Assessment

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2010

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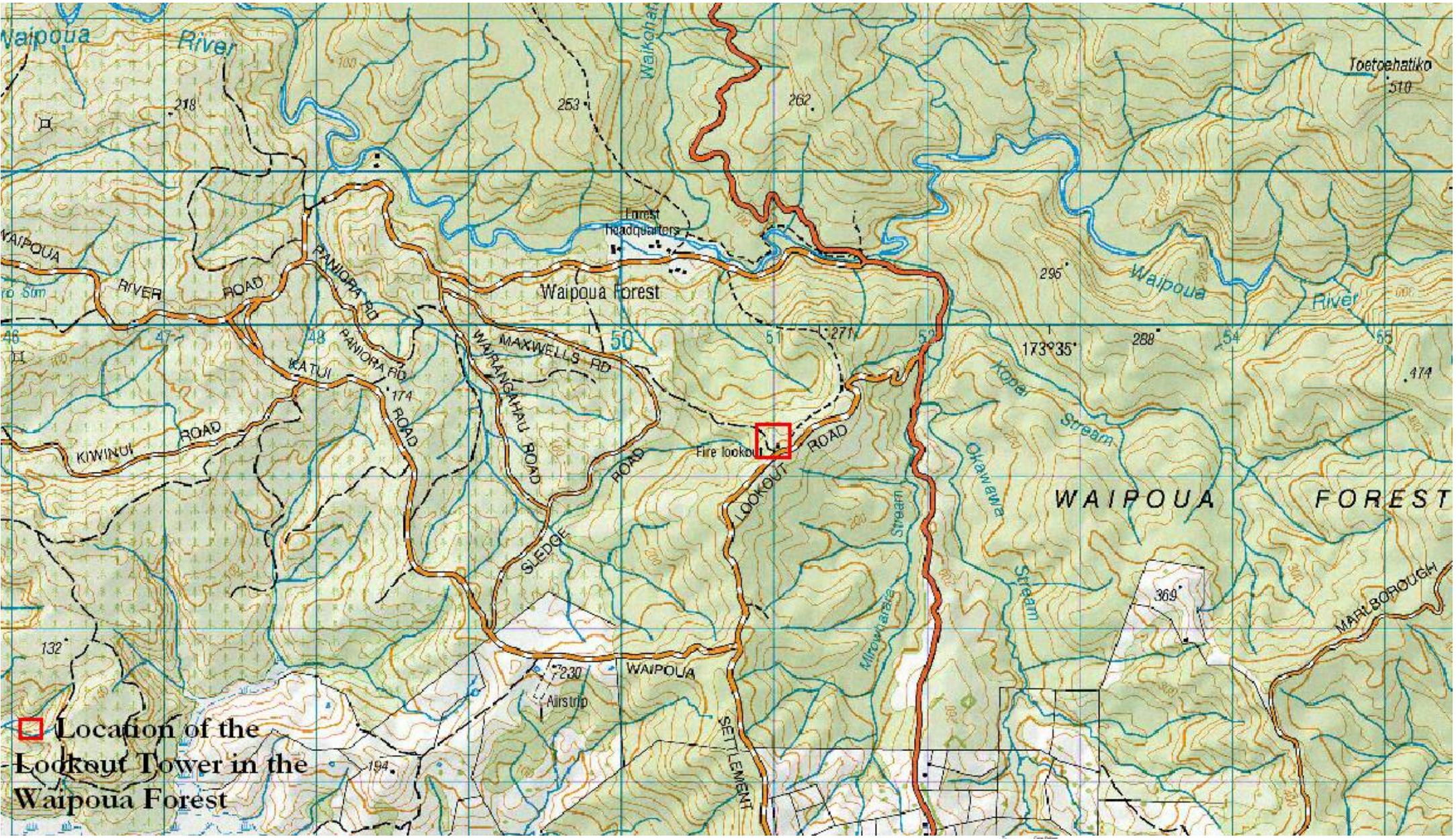
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Location of the Lookout Tower in the Waipoua Forest



## 1. SITE OVERVIEW

The Waipoua Forest Fire Tower Lookout operated under the New Zealand Forest Service and plans were drawn up in 1950. The tower provided housing and protection for a person known as a "fire lookout" and it was their duty to search for fires in the forest. The Waipoua tower has panoramic views of the forest and is located on a highpoint in order to maximize the viewing distance and range. Of the tower itself, there is little information, however it is regionally significant as it symbolizes the early protection of the Waipoua forest, the largest remaining native tract of forest in Northland. The tower is still in good condition although the original centerpiece elevation map has long since been removed. A unique feature of the structure is the compass ticks around the inside upper window sash. These were used to take bearings on fires and are still well preserved.

Land status- *Historic building*

Administered by- *Kauri Coast area office*

Access by- *State highway 12, lookout road*

Annual visitor numbers- *Unknown*

Heritage status-*Protected and managed under the Conservation Act 1987*

Site area-*building 61 square metres*

Functional location number-*DN-61-400-5028*

## 2. HISTORY DESCRIPTION

Some of the earliest papers on the lookout date from the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1950. The first is a memorandum is for the "Officer in Charge, Waipoua Forest" from F.J Perham, The Conservator of Forests" (see appendix 1a). This is titled Waipoua Forest- Lookout, Northern end, building site. The letter although not very informative does supply an idea for dates of the construction of the tower. The reply to this letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 1950 discusses the suitability of the site as a forest lookout and caretaker's quarters (see appendix 1b). The last letter concerning plans for the construction of the tower continues until 28<sup>th</sup> June 1951 (see appendix 1c, d).

These letters mark the beginning of plans for a forest lookout in the Waipoua Forest. Reportedly there are old diaries from the lookout written by the people who were stationed here. Locating these in the archives would be a valuable source of information for the lookout. These could address questions of what people were involved with the tower, fire events and stories of day to day life. There is however one article from the *Weekly News*, dated November 1<sup>st</sup> 1961 titled "Summer Guardians of the Waipoua Forest" The following extract is from this article:

*On October 1, two men climbed into their lonely lookout station high in the Waipoua Forest. These seven day a week watchmen, Bill Rawiri and Jack Te Rore, stay on the job until April 30. The fire season, the season of all danger for all foresters all over New Zealand has begun.<sup>1</sup>*

At the time this article was written Fred Muir was the ranger in charge of the Waipoua. The article describes some of the daily jobs (such as above) that were undertaken at the look out tower during the fire season.

A daily action sheet was kept showing the location of the twenty five forest employees who were all trained in fire fighting. A fire engine, tanker and trailer pump always stood at the ready. A hazard graph was also kept during the fire season. Each day the rainfall, humidity and amount of sunshine were plotted on a graph. Also two pieces of carefully measured pine were pegged outside. One was a block that represented logs lying in the forest and the other was a lighter stick which represented branches. These were weighed each day to measure moisture content. From these experiments levels of fire hazard could be ascertained.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. FABRIC DESCRIPTION

The tower is part of Northland's built heritage and is in relatively good condition. The basic structural elements are a tower room with wrap around decking and windows (see appendix 2a, b, c), and a lower room which is boarded up, possibly the ablutions room (see appendix d). The date of construction based upon the materials used and the technique is estimated to be mid to late 1950's. This is also confirmed by the correspondence with the Conservator of Forests regarding plans for building the lookout. An assessment conducted by DoC in 2010 gives an overall condition report on the lookout.<sup>3</sup> It has had recent repair work to the windows to keep it weatherproof and the windows have been recently replaced since they were broken by vandals. Part of the ceiling is beginning to sag and there have been two instances of vandalism to the inside paintwork. There has been a recent addition of an antenna to the roof done without DoC consultation.<sup>4</sup> The whole structure cannot be viewed at present as the lower room is boarded up. This room appears to be plumbed and is probably an "ablution room". It would be beneficial to open this up to confirm its function. The groove in the ground surface leading from the structure is probably an old drain associated with the Lookout. There are compass marks going around the upper window sashes that are unique to the building (figure 1 and 2). These were used to take bearings on fire locations.



Figure 1: Image of inner compass ticks and bearings on the upper sash of the windows



Figure 2: Compass ticks and bearing on the upper window sash of the tower room (Blanshard 2010).

#### **4. CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**

This lookout tower is associated with the people who worked for the New Zealand Forest Service and specifically those who were stationed here. Their efforts helped to preserve the forest for future generations. It is also connected to all New Zealanders as part of the country's early Forestry history. The old diaries concerning this tower could provide valuable information about cultural connections to the Lookout.

#### **5. NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Nationally this lookout represents an important aspect of work carried out by the New Zealand Forest Service, and is the only fire Lookout in the North Island that is managed by the Department of Conservation. However there are numerous lookout towers in the North Island some of which are still in operation.<sup>5</sup> They include those in the Kaingaroa, Te puke, Glenbervie, Hukatere and Opure forests.

An extract from 'A Brief History of Forestry in New Zealand' describes the circumstances and environment under which the Lookout tower was built and a history of the area surrounding it:

“From 1874 to 1919, a succession of Forest Acts were promoted by small groups of enthusiasts and passed by parliament, with the main purposes of giving the forests special legal status and protecting them from fire. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1917 Prime Minister Massey announced he would set up a special department of forestry and this was set up from 1<sup>st</sup> September 1919 under L. Macintosh Ellis. From 1940 to 1952 a campaign aroused public interest of Waipoua forest in Northland which resulted in it being given forest sanctuary status by parliament and being removed from forest management. This was probably the first major confrontation between people wishing to preserve a tract of indigenous forest essentially untouched no matter what, and professionally trained forest managers who also saw the opportunity to provide for the

timber needs of people in addition to providing professional conservation activity for the same biota and land.”<sup>6</sup>

From the dates in this extract and the correspondence with the Conservator of Forests it can be deduced that plans were being drawn for the Lookout tower when the campaign for a forest sanctuary was well underway and nearing completion. It is likely then that the tower would have been built and operated solely when the forest was a protected sanctuary.

## **6. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**

The Lookout tower is regionally significant as it represents early efforts by people to protect the Waipoua Forest, when it became a protected sanctuary.

## **7. FABRIC SIGNIFICANCE**

The most significant aspect of the fabric is the compass ticks located around the upper window sashes. These would have been used to give bearings on any smoke sightings and need to be preserved. A perspex cover would protect them from future vandalism which has already affected areas of the paint work. Aspects of the lookout tower appear to be its original in design. DoC Canterbury manages three, none of which is the same as the Waipoua Lookout.<sup>7</sup>

## **8. CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

This Lookout tower is culturally significant to the region and to the people and families of those who worked here.

## **9. MANAGEMENT RECOMENDATIONS**

- Open up the downstairs boarded room. This would verify its function and could add value to the structure as a whole.
- There are old diaries that exist, possibly in the New Zealand archives in Wellington, from this tower these could provide valuable information about the day to day life in the tower, and names of the people who worked here. This would add significantly to the overall values of the lookout.

*Recommendations from the brief assessment of the lookout by A. Blanshard (DoC) 2010*

- That the lower room be looked at, it appears to be plumbed with a possible septic tank beneath, these should be checked.
- That some of the vegetation be cut back so that it does not interfere with the wrap around lookout deck (see appendix 2e).
- That a roofer or someone who is experienced with roofs checks that the addition of the internet aerial has not damaged the structure of the roof.



- The building to be added to AMIS as a visitor structure so that any safety issues are highlighted and where possible rectified.
- That it be added to Northlands actively managed historic site list and placed into AMIS as such. So that it's unique historic elements are conserved
- Replace guttering (like for like)
- Highlight and protect compass tick marks
- That a heritage architect does a full assessment which can be used should any visitor upgrades prove necessary.
- That a building engineer who is aware of our structure standards should visit the site and draw up remedial works list.
- Once a heritage architect and a building engineer have reviewed the structure, an integrated approach needs to be taken so that visitors are made safe but the historic values are protected and if possible enhanced.

## 10. MANAGEMENT HISTORY

- Windows replaced due to vandalism.
- 2010 Historic structure assessment by A. Blanshard.

## 11. MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION

DOCDM- 831475

Current management file numbers- [RVA-05-11-02-01 NLKC-1 29/02/2004](#); [RVA-05-11-02-01 NLKC-2 12/11/2003](#); [RVA-05-11-02-01 NLKC-3 01/11/2003](#); [RVA-05-11-02-01 NLKC-4 20/03/2007](#); [RVA-05-11-02-03 NLKC-1 01/01/2007](#); [RVA-05-11-02-04 NLKC-1 23/04/2008](#).

*No historic files could be found for the Lookout tower itself*

Heritage assessment- *yes docdm 831475*

Baseline inspection- *Kauri Coast Forestry Lookout 2010. A. Blanshard (Bay of Islands Area Office) and Awbi Nathan (Kauri Coast Area Office)*

## 12. SOURCES

Blanshard, A. 2010. Kauri Coast Forestry Lookout: A brief assessment. Department of Conservation, Bay of Islands Area Office. Docdm-616466

### *Archives*

State Forests-single mens' camp layout: Waipoua Forest BBAX 1124 109e 6/13/10  
New Zealand Archives. [www.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archives.govt.nz)

### *Newspapers*

*Weekly news* "Summer guardians of the Waipoua" by Noel M. Roe. Wednesday  
November 1, 1961.

### *Websites*

Swale, B.J. A brief History of Forestry in New Zealand.  
<http://homepages.caverock.net.nz/~bj/beeceh/sustainable/forest3.htm>

### *Sources for follow up*

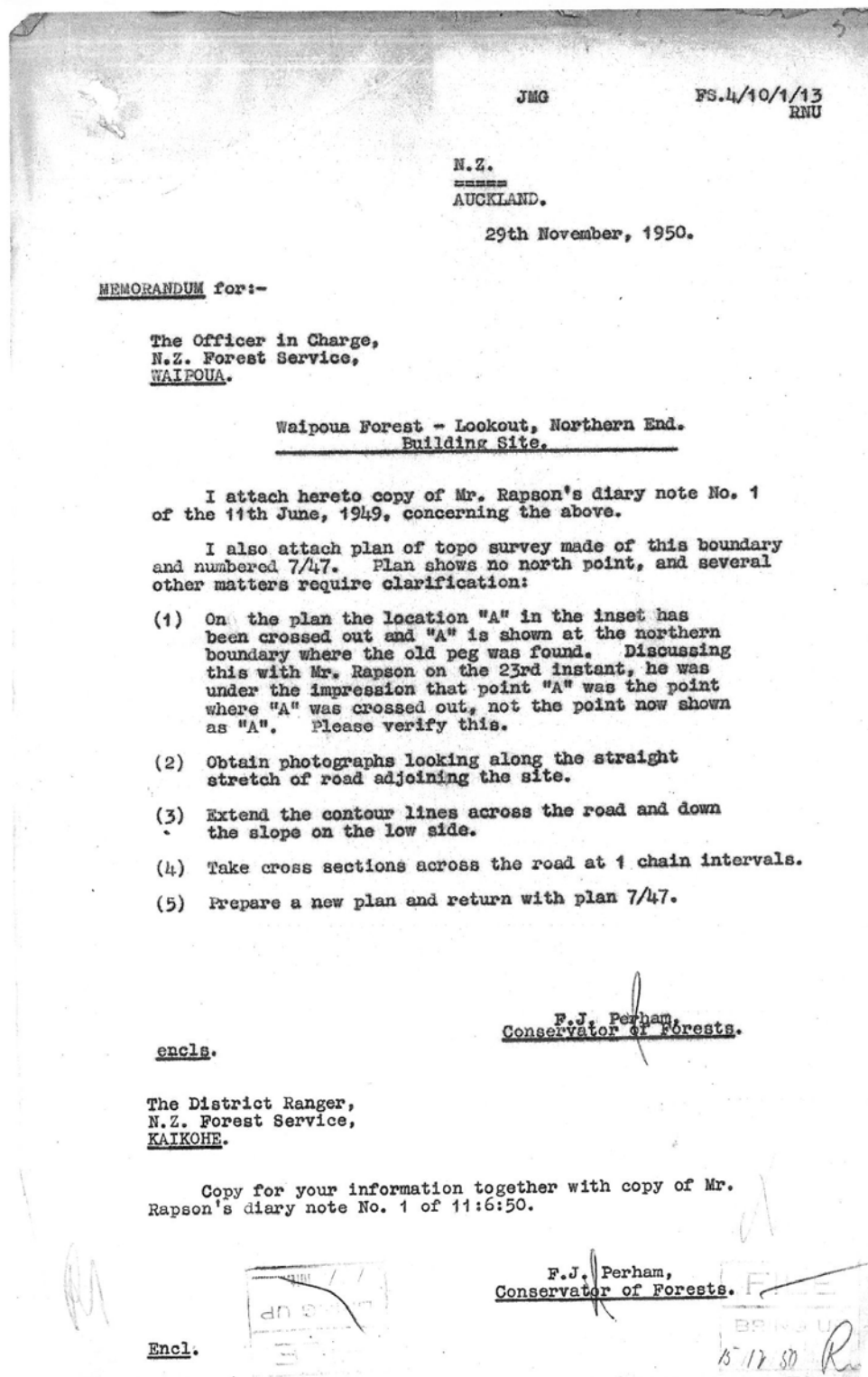
Roche, M., 1990. *New Zealand Forestry Corporation*. GP books Wellington, New Zealand.

Poole, A.L., 1969. *Forestry in New Zealand*. Auckland, Hodder (*Kaikobe Library 634.9 POO*).

Macgregor, W. R., 1948. *The Waipoua forest: The last Virgin Kauri Forest in New Zealand*.  
(*Kaikobe Library 333.78*)

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Appendix 1 (Documents)



Appendix 1a: Document to the "Officer in Charge" from the "Conservator of Forests" referring to the beginning of the lookout tower construction.





4/10/1/12 [F.S.-E. 12. 7

In your reply  
FS 4/10/13 FTH.  
Please quote these numbers.

NZ. STATE FOREST SERVICE

Waipoua Forest,  
P. B. Dargaville.

18th. December 1950.

The Conservator of Forests,  
P. O. Box 942,  
AUCKLAND. C. 1.

Waipoua Forest - Look-out, Northern end - Building Site.

In reply to your FS 4/10/1/13 RNU dated 29th. November 1950, I submit the following report :-

1. The surveyed site coincides with point "A" as shown on the location plan.
2. Photographs are enclosed showing the field of view from point "A". Numbers 1 and 2 show the area in the direction of Waimamaku i.e. north-west from the point "A". Number 3 shows the area due north from point "A" i.e. the Wekaweka Valley. It is not possible to photograph any straight of road in the Waimamaku direction from the look-out site.
3. Plan of area with contour lines extended is forwarded under separate cover.
4. Plan showing cross sections of the road at 1 chain intervals is forwarded under separate cover. The old plan is returned.

Remarks.

The suitability of this site will depend on it's principal function. If required for a forest look-out and caretaker's residence, this site could not be improved upon. However, if the building is to be erected mainly for the benefit of the general public i.e. look-out and map-room, travellers from the Waimamaku direction would be inconvenienced by the acute-angled turn-off to the site. Such a turn-off is likely to be a source of danger to motorists.

The ideal entrance in this case would be the "drive-in drive-out" type with adequate visibility from both directions. A site with this type of entrance and still commanding an extensive view could only be obtained on the private property immediately to the north-west of the Waipoua Forest entrance.

Reference	Initials
RNU	AM

*[Signature]*  
Assistant Forester.

FILE  
BRING

5/1/51  
*[Signature]*

Appendix 1b: Document to the "Officer in Charge" that refers to the construction of the Waipoua Lookout Tower

P.S. 4/10/1/13 Wg 20

P.O. Box 942,  
AUCKLAND.  
 16th May 1951.

**MEMORANDUM For:**

**The District Ranger,  
 N.Z. Forest Service,  
 KAIKOHE.**

**Waipoua Forest Lookout - Northern end  
 Proposed Site - your files 4/10/13 & 6/13.**

Referring to my memorandum of the 19th March 1951,  
 and a subsequent conversation with you on the 24th  
 April, kindly advise when the delivery of the topogr-  
 aphical plan on the above proposal can be expected.

**F.J. Perham,  
 Conservator of Forests.**

FILE  
 BRING UP  
 30-5-51 Wg  
 15-6-51

Appendix 1c: Document to the "District Ranger" referring to the construction of the Waipoua lookout tower.

22

FS 6/1/13 FTM.

Waipoua Forest,  
P.B.Dargaville.

28th. June 1951.

The District Ranger,  
P.O.Box 2,  
KAIKOHE.

Waipoua Forest Look-out - Northern end proposed site.

Reference your SF 6/13 CR dated 21st. March 1951.

I have forwarded to you under separate cover, plans of sites "A" and "B" for the caretaker's residence and forest lodge at the northern entrance to Waipoua Forest. Please note that the area laid-off on site "B" includes part of the road reserve,

Remarks.

1. Site "A".

1.1 The proposed site in relationship to road safety.

As the forest lodge will be open to the general public, it is essential to devise a type of entrance and exit which will afford the maximum road safety. For this site it is possible to construct a diversion from the mainhighway at approximately a 1 in 10 grade. This road would commence in the area near grid peg E1 and would proceed to grid peg D4 via grid peg B2. With the provision of a parking area outside the lodge, motorists could drive to and from the mainhighway without having to negotiate concealed or difficult corners

1.2 The forest cover on Site "A".

To afford the maximum view from the site, it is recommended that all the vegetation be cleared from the area. The area should be sown in grass and any future lay-out be restricted to indigenous shrubs. It would also be necessary to remove trees to the north of the road reserve which would impede the view.

1.3 The site as a look-out point.

With the clearance of the vegetation, a fair view of the Waimamaku Valley, lower Wekaweka Valley, the southern part of SF 12 and SF 154, would be obtained.

2. Site "B".

2.1 Site "B" in relationship to road safety.

The high road batter prevents any possibility of the "drive in - drive out" scheme as mentioned in 1.1. An entrance to this site could only be made near a dangerous corner with obvious implications as far as motorists are concerned.

2.2 The forest cover on Site "B".

The forest cover would be removed from the site as in 1.2. With such a high batter, it would only be necessary to fell odd trees to the north of the road reserve.

2.3 The site as a look-out point.

This site offers a more extensive view of the Waimamaku and Wekaweka Valleys and surrounding country, than does site "A".

Recommendations.

As the forest lodge will be visited by the general public, it is recommended that Site "A" with the safer entrance, be adopted. Attached please find prints of the main road (1) Looking towards H.Q. from H2 (11) Approaching D4 from Waimamaku. *W. Morrison AIF*

Appendix 1d: Document to the "District Ranger" referring to the construction of the Waipoua lookout tower.



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Appendix 2: (Images)



Appendix 2a: The tower room of the lookout (Blanshard 2010).



Appendix 2b: Part of the wrap around deck (Goddard 2010).



Appendix 2c: The inside of the tower room (Blanshard 2010).



Appendix 2d: The boarded up windows of the lower room (Goddard 2010).



Appendix 2e: The Lookout showing vegetation growth that should be removed to protect the decking (Blanshard 2010).



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## Endnotes

1. *Weekly News* Summer Guardians of the Waipoua Forest 1961.
2. *ibid*
3. Blanshard, A., 2010. Kauri Coast Forestry Lookout. Department of Conservation, Bay of Islands.
4. *ibid*
5. T Bullock Bay of Islands area office, pers comm.
6. Swale, B.J. A brief History of Forestry in New Zealand pg 6
7. Blanshard, 2010 (op cit).