

HAERE MAI :: NAU MAI :: HAERE MAI

WELCOME TO THE AWHITU PENINSULA: Land, Wind and Water

protecting our past :: planning our presence :: feeding our future

Coming to live here? Looking for land or a home here? Just visiting?



Awhitu Peninsula Landcare welcomes you, and invites you to use the information in this, and the other broadsheets available:

What is the Awhitu Peninsula?
Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Animal Pests
Towards a Pest-Free Peninsula: Plant Pests

The Shaping of the Peninsula

Forty kilometres from Waiuku to the northern tip, 10km wide on average, the Peninsula was originally a sand-bar at the mouth of the Manukau, built up over a couple of million years by layers of sand from the Tasman Sea and from the Waikato River when it flowed into the Manukau.

Apart from coastal sandstone, which is compacted sand and easily breaks down, the only true rock on the Peninsula is its base below sea level. The distinctive hills are wind-sculpted dunes, up to 300m high. On the west coast, at Karioitahi, Cochrane's Gap: Te Ara o Te Po or Hamilton's Gap: Waimatuku, you can see the high sand cliffs being moulded and carved by wind and water each day to new spectacular forms.

As well as the sand, there were falls of volcanic ash during the time that the Peninsula was forming, and scrub and forest built up on the sand dunes. On the steep western hills the mature forest was mainly broad-leaved with puriri the predominant species, while the gentler eastern slopes and gullies were clothed in podocarp species with extensive areas of kauri. Manuka and pohutukawa fringed the whole peninsula, and were scattered throughout the forest. There were fresh-water lakes, streams and swamps rich, like the bush, with plant and animal life.

For many centuries, Maori found the Peninsula a good place to live, because of its wealth of fish, bird-life, bush and wetland food sources, and places suitable for seasonal camps, permanent villages and defence against invaders.



Bad news for bush...

Both Maori and Pakeha have, of course, changed the land.

Maori burnt and cultivated small areas, particularly around pa (villages) and fishing camps on the harbour coast.

From the middle of the nineteenth century on, Pakeha logging firms cut much of the kauri for buildings in Auckland and for export to Australia. Locals logged kauri trees for buildings and boats, and puriri for ground-durable posts, as well as burning cutover bush and cutting scrub to establish farmland or to dig for kauri gum.



So by the middle of the 20th century native bush was reduced to less than 8% of the total land area. Most of the remaining bush had been selectively logged in the 19th and early 20th century, but was by then regenerating.

The introduction by settlers of farm animals during the same period radically altered land use; and other mammals – especially rats, ferrets, stoats, deer, possums, goats and hedgehogs – rapidly destroyed much of the native bird life on the Peninsula.

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...and good news too

There have always been landowners who have seen the value of protecting native bush on their land (indeed, there are 38 QEII Trust covenants plus many other privately protected bush lots on the Peninsula). Native bush provides shelter, and is a source of food and habitats for the native bat, birds, frogs, lizards, insects and other invertebrates contributing to the health of our overall ecosystems.

Many native plants also have significant health and nutritional properties known to Maori and being developed commercially today, like manuka (tea tree), which contains – as does manuka honey – natural anti-fungal and anti-bacterial substances, and harakeke (flax), which provides antiseptic, laxative and healing products as well as fibre.



Some native trees can also be grown as profitable timber crops on farms, and soon a range of new provisions will become available for carbon credits for land planted in native bush.

Since the 1970s, when the Awhitu Regional Park was established, and more recently with the work of the Awhitu Peninsula Landcare group (founded in 1994) through its Trees for Survival, public reserve planting and pest control programmes, much progress has been made in maintaining and enhancing native biodiversity on the Peninsula. The Awhitu Peninsula Landcare group has set up a forest health-monitoring project, and is encouraging other research activities to keep track of this progress.

What we have observed and documented so far:

- ❖ There are more protected bush blocks and wetlands, some containing special plants such as king fern, swamp maire and rare orchids and the few remaining very large old kauri, puriri and kahikatea. All have many regenerating forest species.
- ❖ A great deal of new planting has taken place on both public and private land. It is estimated that since 1990 more than 100,000 native trees and shrubs have been planted.
- ❖ The number of possums has been dramatically reduced – the latest monitoring, in 2007, shows we have reduced numbers from 20% to 3% RTC* over the Peninsula as a whole, so possums are now below the threshold defined as a major threat to native bush and bird life. (* Residual Trap Catch is a measure of possum population density based on numbers caught over a specified time and distance). There has been some secondary kill of rats and mustelids, too.
- ❖ The pohutukawa and fruit trees on the Peninsula have – as a result of possum control – bloomed and fruited more frequently since possum numbers dropped.
- ❖ Native bird numbers – particularly of kereru (pigeon), tui and piwaiwaka (fantail) – have increased dramatically, and there have been sightings of kaka, korimako (bellbird), mohopereru (banded rail) and matata (fernbird) again.

We encourage you to read the two sections in this booklet on pest control, and to consult Awhitu Peninsula Landcare about appropriate pest protection and plantings for your property, as well as sources of funding and other assistance available to help you.

Sand, wind, water

Sand country poses special challenges for farmers.

Cattle and sheep have been a vital part of the Peninsula's economy for more than a hundred years now, and properly managed, they are still a major asset.

However, great care needs to be taken to ensure that the animals do not damage the highly erosion-prone soils here, especially coastal margins, steep western dunes, or fragile historic sites.

The farming of deer, pigs or goats is more challenging still, and should only be undertaken by experienced farmers who ensure adequate fencing and management.

Because of the strong predominant salt-laden southwesterly winds, any damage to grass cover can result in sand blows, which can take over hectares of productive land very quickly. Also, wave action and natural water seepage through the sand undermines cliff edges, and there are often slumps from coastal margins. Fencing off these fragile margins, and planting them with appropriate sand-managing plants, can help to save pasture further inland.



Awhitu Peninsula Landcare has produced a series of booklets on managing sand country, and urges you to pick up a set from the Awhitu Information Office or access them on our website if you are moving into the district. We can also put you in touch with farmers successfully managing land similar to yours.

Alternatives to Pastoral Farming

In recent years, increasing numbers of landowners have become interested in alternatives to dairy, beef and sheep farming.

Farm forestry

There are both native and exotic plantations on the Peninsula; growth rates can be excellent. However, care needs to be taken to choose appropriate species for salt-laden winds and a humid climate. Planting also needs to be planned in consultation with Ngaati Te Ata to ensure that archaeological sites are not damaged, and a good distance should be maintained from fragile cliff edges.



Fruit, nuts, vegetables, herbs, flowers

Many plants grow superbly on the well-drained soils of the Peninsula. Traditional northern hemisphere fruit such as apple, pear, plum, and quince flourish alongside more exotic species from the Pacific (banana), Mexico (feijoa, tamarillo, avocado), South America (casimiroa, cherimoya, pabachi), North America (blueberry, cranberry) and Asia (persimmon, nashi, arguta).

Selection of climate-appropriate varieties makes organic growing of deciduous varieties straightforward, and there are few natural predators to attack the subtropicals.

There are several successful vineyards and olive groves too, and a variety of nut plantations, especially macadamia. Vegetables, herbs and flowers of many kinds thrive in the sandy soils of the Peninsula, where there is adequate water available.

A sustainable future

There is considerable scope for more organic growing of all kinds on the Peninsula. The development of a unique organic brand for local produce would enhance sales opportunities for all the growers involved, and new cooperatives for food marketing, packaging, processing and distribution would increase economic and employment opportunities on the Peninsula. Other sustainable enterprises such as eco-tourism, multimedia production, recreational and professional development businesses and e-commerce can all contribute to a prosperous and healthy future on the Awhitu Peninsula. Our proximity to Auckland, combined with the natural beauty and rural character of the Peninsula, can give environmentally-friendly business activities here a real point of difference.

Water, again

Peninsula residents are dependent on three water sources: rain, springs, and underground aquifers. Installing adequate rainwater tanks, using springs and bores where necessary, and maintaining leak-free plumbing, are vital to family life and land use here.



But special care also needs to be taken to avoid pollution of ground water, which seeps through to our underground aquifers. Excessive nitrogen and phosphorus from chemical fertilisers and farm animals are dangerous, and human sewage treatment needs special care. Older septic tanks should be cleaned regularly (every three years at least), and there are several more effective modern waste treatment systems available.

And, of course, the health of dune lakes, streams, the Manukau Harbour, the ocean, and the extensive sea food beds and fisheries around the Peninsula depends on protecting streams edges and maintaining wetlands as filter systems so that home and farm pollution does not enter the waterways.

Fonterra, farmers' discussion groups and farm advisory services will assist with advice on these matters.

All residents on the Awhitu Peninsula can help protect and enhance the biodiversity of the Peninsula by:

- ❖ Fencing any native bush remnants and wetlands on your land to prevent stock grazing in them
- ❖ Joining the Peninsula Pest Control Programme
- ❖ Using the ARC leaflets available to help you in plant choice
- ❖ Asking advice from Awhitu Peninsula Landcare members (a list of people who can advise on dairy, beef, sheep or deer farming, farm forestry, fruit growing, vineyard establishment, organic growing and a variety of other activities is available from the Awhitu Information Office)
- ❖ Employing local landscape design and management business people to assist you in land use and development decisions (further information available from the Information Office)

Further reading

1. Awhitu History Book Society published **Heads, Harbour and Hills: An Awhitu History** in 1999, and a revised edition is now available too.
2. The ARC (Auckland Regional Council) in 2004 published a detailed survey of the indigenous vegetation of the Awhitu District: **Awhitu and Manukau Ecological Districts: Indigenous Vegetation Survey. Volumes 1 and 2.** A copy can be read at the Awhitu Peninsula Landcare office at Matakawau, or obtained from the ARC.
3. The ARC has also published a range of very useful pamphlets on biodiversity, native plants, animal pests and weeds; copies are available at the Landcare office, and on-line at: http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/main/environment/plants-and-animals/publications/publications_home.cfm
4. Tricia Aspin, a life-long resident of the Peninsula, has written a book on the botany of the Awhitu Peninsula which will be of great interest – it is to be published late 2008, and will be called **Maioiro to Manukau Heads: A Botanical Journey Through Awhitu District.**



**We welcome newcomers to join us in
protecting our past...planning our presence...feeding our future**

This broadsheet, **Welcome to the Awhitu Peninsula: What is the Awhitu Peninsula**, has been supported by the Department of Conservation and the Auckland Regional Council, and by local Real Estate agent Lyn Peacock, of Barfoot and Thompson.



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