

The island's history

NOTE: For a full account of Tiritiri Matangi Island's history, it is recommended that teachers access a copy of 'Tiritiri Matangi A Model of Conservation' by Anne Rimmer (full bibliographical details elsewhere in this kit), a book worthy of inclusion in all school and private libraries.

First time visitors to Tiritiri Matangi today would find it difficult to reconcile what they see before them to the picture David Bellamy paints in his forward to Anne Rimmer's book: . . . *'Tiritiri Matangi bore the ravages of the war on the earth, stripped of its native species that made and held the soils together; its very natural history spoiled by the introduction of what became feral plants and animals. A place of sad solitude . . .'*

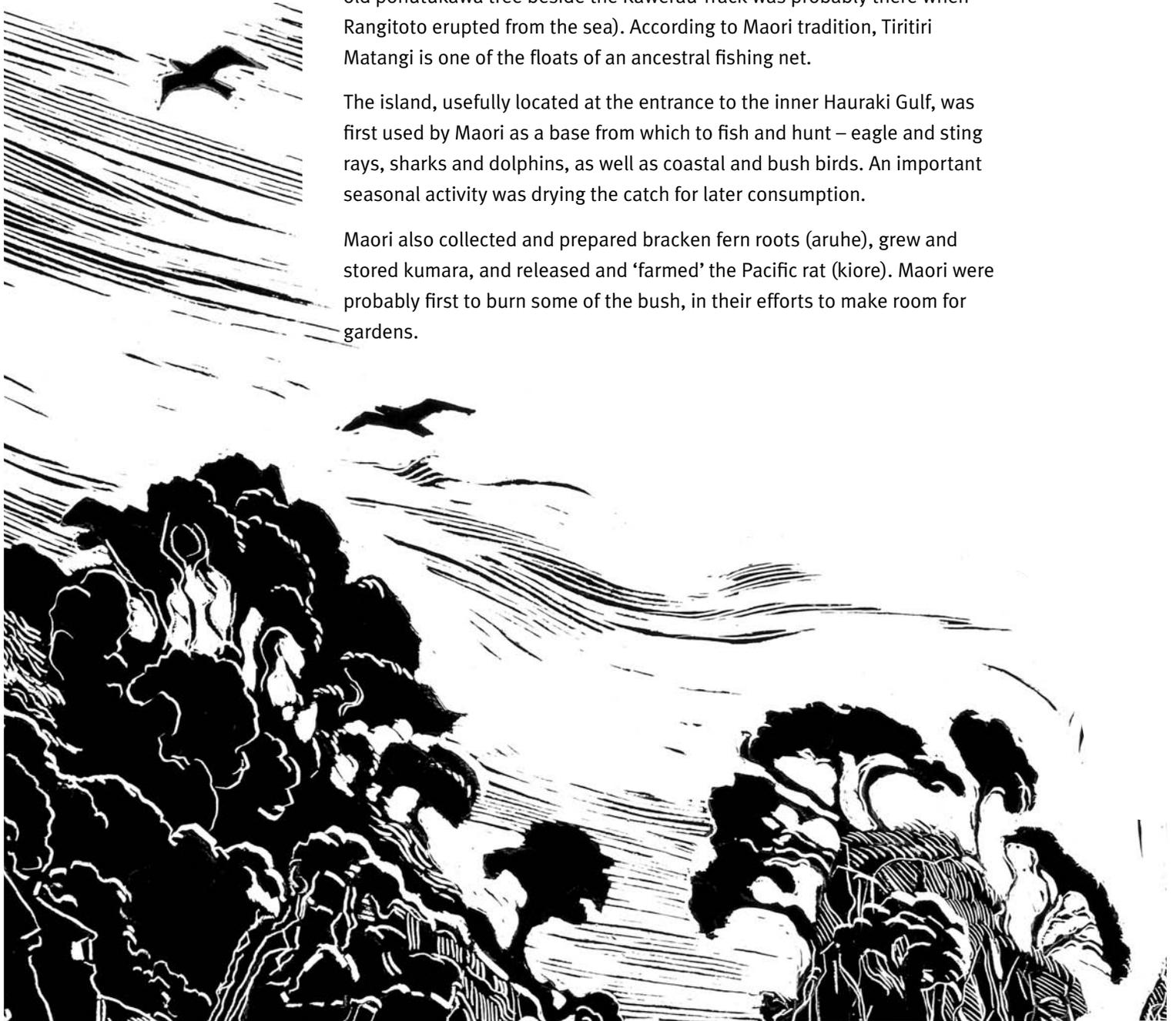
How did it get into that sad state and then recover to what we see today?

Maori settlement

Tiritiri Matangi Island has a long history of human habitation, possibly from 800 years ago when Maori settled the Auckland region. (The big old pohutukawa tree beside the Kawerau Track was probably there when Rangitoto erupted from the sea). According to Maori tradition, Tiritiri Matangi is one of the floats of an ancestral fishing net.

The island, usefully located at the entrance to the inner Hauraki Gulf, was first used by Maori as a base from which to fish and hunt – eagle and sting rays, sharks and dolphins, as well as coastal and bush birds. An important seasonal activity was drying the catch for later consumption.

Maori also collected and prepared bracken fern roots (aruhe), grew and stored kumara, and released and 'farmed' the Pacific rat (kiore). Maori were probably first to burn some of the bush, in their efforts to make room for gardens.



In the early days Maori on Tiritiri Matangi lived in seaside settlements, but as easily-obtained food supplies dwindled throughout the land, wars broke out and the small number of people living on Tiritiri Matangi built pa (fortified villages) for protection. Two pa sites have been identified on the island, Tiritiri Matangi Pa on a headland north of Hobbs Beach (Kawerau iwi) and Papakura Pa on the northern tip of the island (Ngati Paoa iwi). Two other iwi, Ngai Tai and Murutuahi also have ancestral links with the island.

As Hongi Hika and others from Ngapuhi iwi, using muskets, raged through northern New Zealand in 1821 to avenge historical slights, the Kawerau people abandoned Tiritiri Matangi. In later years the island was again used seasonally to harvest food in the sea and on land, however.

Pakeha use

a The lighthouse

Tiritiri Matangi was designated as a lighthouse reserve and Crown land as early as 1841, although a Native Land Court claim in 1867 requested it be returned to Maori.

In 1864, a lighthouse was built, after being brought out from England as a kitset. Lighthouse keepers, signalmen and their families lived on the island until the lighthouse was automated in 1984. Although it appears the children found life on the island quite idyllic, the adults were constantly battling water shortages, difficult access and worries over access to medical help in emergencies. They were also affected by loneliness, a lack of social life and boring routines.

Although the same lighthouse has existed on the island from 1864 to the present day, there have been many changes to the light and the way it has been powered:

1864	colza oil
1880	paraffin oil
1916	an improved pressurised system
1925	a flashing acetylene light
1955	diesel generators providing electric light
1965	the Davis Marine Light creating the brightest light in the southern hemisphere
1984	a less powerful quartz iodine light
1991	a conversion to solar panel powered batteries
2002	an upgrade to a brighter New Zealand built light

The Tiritiri Matangi lighthouse is the oldest still in operation in New Zealand, and has the best-preserved collection of associated buildings. Much of the preservation work has been done by Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi members, including recent work restoring the foghorn and associated building.

The lighthouse itself is the responsibility of the Maritime Safety Authority but the associated buildings are the responsibility of the Department of Conservation.

Lighthouse facts . . .

The tower is 21 metres high

The light is 91 metres above sea level

The light can be seen for 33 kilometres (18 nautical miles)

The light flashes once every 15 seconds

The tower's base diameter is 4.7 metres



b Farming

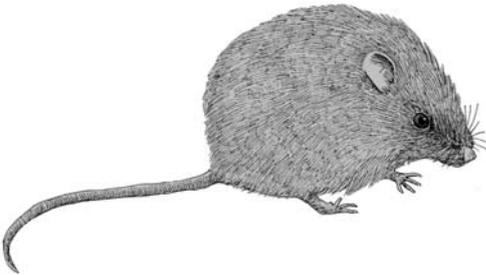
Tiritiri Matangi's designation as Crown Land allowed it to be leased for farming, and farming was carried out from the 1850's, with several Pakeha families having tenure until 1902. At this time, the Hobbs family took over the lease, running the island farm from their home on Whangaparaoa.

(Incidentally, in 1908 a far-seeing Crown Lands ranger insisted that Tiritiri Matangi's pohutukawa trees be preserved even though the island was regularly 'burnt-off' to encourage grass growth).

Stock was taken to and from the island by various craft, including, in latter years, a barge. They were loaded at what is now known as Hobbs Beach and were sometimes held at the southern end of the beach in pens made of totara.

In 1970 the Marine Department, which was at the time administering the island, returned all but the immediate lighthouse reserve to the Crown and the island was gazetted as a recreational reserve.

In 1971 Tiritiri Matangi Island became part of the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park (HGMP) and all farming ceased. The last farmer was a member of the Hobbs family, meaning that the Hobbs family had leased and farmed the island for 69 years in total.



c Port war signal station and fortress observation post

Surprisingly, Tiritiri Matangi Island also has six years of military history.

The day after the Second World War was declared in 1939, Royal New Zealand Volunteer Reserve members were sent to live on the island to man the Port War Signal Station in order to identify all ships approaching Auckland.

Later, the Auckland Harbour Board also provided observers, and then the New Zealand Army established the Fortress Observation Post. This controlled the mines that had been laid in the Tiritiri Matangi channel and provided information to the nine inch guns on Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

Because farming stock had been taken off the island, the grass flourished and so did kiore. As a result, both navy and army personnel experienced a rat plague. The resumption of farming later shortened the grass again and rats ceased to be a problem at that stage.

Tiritiri Matangi in 1936.
Photo: George Ramsay



d Recreation reserve

Once farming ceased, Tiritiri Matangi became one of the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park recreation reserves and people were encouraged to use it for picnics. Its surrounding seas were already well known by recreational fishers.

A botanist from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) advised that the island would eventually return to its original state within a century, with no replanting necessary. However, Mr Hobbs warned this was unlikely to be the case and that grass and scrub would prevent native trees from growing.



Hinemoa's boat leaving Tiritiri Matangi, October 1904 (shows a whare and Hobbs' bach behind the beach).

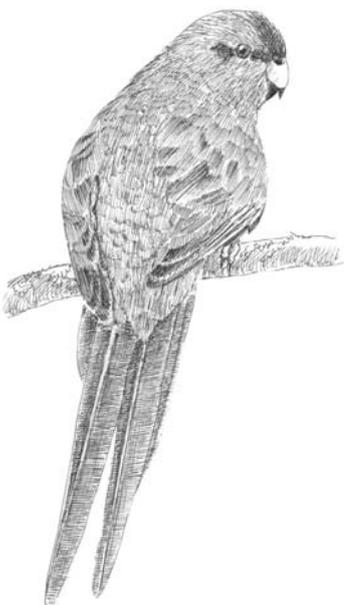
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e Scientific reserve

John Craig, a zoologist from the University of Auckland, looking for a research project, discovered Tiritiri Matangi with its recently-transferred red-crowned parakeets, bellbirds, tui and pukeko, long grass and kiore population. He began to make regular monthly visits with students, travelling to the island either in the lighthouse tender or in a small 14-foot open aluminium boat, and staying in a disused woolshed on the beach. Soon Neil Mitchell, a botanist, joined the group.

A graduate student, Carol West, proved that thick grass and bracken would stop seedling trees growing and anything that did begin to grow would be eaten by kiore, thus proving Mr Hobbs correct.

As a result of the university's research, in 1980 the HGMP Board reclassified Tiritiri Matangi as a scientific reserve.



New life for Tiritiri Matangi

a The vision

John Craig and Neil Mitchell had a new vision for Tiritiri Matangi – an ‘open sanctuary’ – in which the public could be totally involved alongside scientists, unlike most scientific reserves which were accessible only to scientists.

The reclassification of the island as a scientific reserve coincided with the arrival on the island of Ray Walter as the new lighthouse keeper. Walter was very supportive of the university people, helping in any way he could.

The 1984 automation of the lighthouse and subsequent loss of the position of lighthouse keeper coincided with the need for a live-in supervisor on the island. Walter retrained with the Department of Conservation and from then he became a driving force in the creation of the Tiritiri Matangi Island we know and love today. He collected seeds from the few remaining native trees on the island, grew the plants and saw them planted out. He drove, adapted and mended machinery, and patiently trained and inspired hundreds of volunteers during his 22 years of DOC tenure.



b Early planting

With stock animals gone, the bald island's grass grew rank, the fire risk became acute and ground cover needed to be planted urgently. At this time, bush only covered six percent of the island.

Originally, experienced people were to do the planting but instead Craig and Mitchell involved the general public. These people came from organisations such as Forest and Bird, schools, church groups, tramping groups, scouts and guides, and ornithological societies. They arrived on all sorts of vessels, as there was no ferry service.

The first plantings were of trees and bushes that could withstand strong salt-laden winds and cover the ground quickly. These included pohutukawa, ngaio, karo, manuka, whau, kawakawa, karaka and members of the coprosma family. Then puriri, kohekohe, nikau, kowhai and so on were planted. Although all plants were originally intended to be from seed collected on the island, this was not always possible due to the small number of viable trees left. Therefore seeds were also sourced from nearby areas including Little Barrier (Hauturu), Cuvier, Rangitoto and the Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

By 1986 Ray Walter's wife, Barbara, had popularised the planting days, changing the exhausting all-day programme to a sort of tiring but fun family get-together, and eventually having so many volunteering that they had to be placed on a waiting list.



Ray and Barbara Walter planting in 1989.
Photo: Liz Maire.

Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi

Initial funding for the replanting came mainly from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), whose fundraising efforts were matched two for one by the government. But when the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board (HGMP), Lands and Survey, Wildlife Service and Forestry Service were absorbed by the newly-formed Department of Conservation, major funding dried up.

Jim Battersby's great idea

Along came Jim Battersby and his wife Barbie with the idea of forming a supporters group, whose membership fees would help support the ongoing programme. The Battersbys had spent many pleasant hours with the replanting crews and wanted to be able to do more. They reasoned that if they wanted more, so would others.

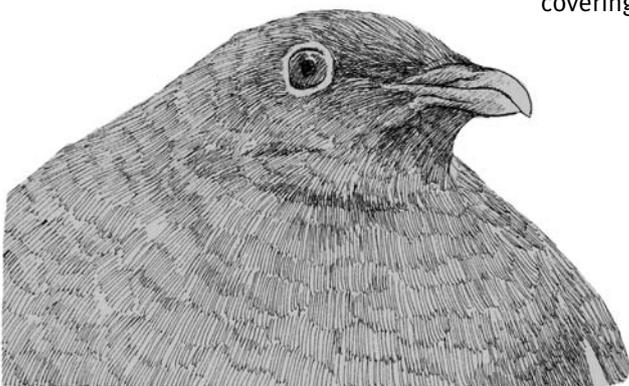
This idea quickly developed and the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi (SOTM) Inc formed at a meeting of just 30 people in October 1988 with the following objectives:

- To promote and enhance the open sanctuary at Tiritiri Matangi and to ensure the continuation of the project.
- To provide financial, material and physical support for the work at Tiritiri Matangi.
- To heighten public awareness of the existence and role of Tiritiri Matangi as an open sanctuary.
- To do all such other lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the foregoing objectives or any of them.

Rapid growth

Within a year there were 150 members and within three years, 209. Membership is now in the thousands.

Formation of the SOTM allowed replanting to become much better organised, and so between 1984 and 1994, 283,000 trees were planted, covering 60 percent of the island.



Clever thinking!

A clause in the constitution allows the SOTM to own assets and this comes in handy when applying for grants to provide such important items as a tractor, a trailer, a farm bike, and a huge shed to house them – all increasingly necessary for the day to day running of the island.

Enlisting support

SOTM have been astute, imaginative and fortunate in their fundraising efforts. Over the years they have managed to gain grants and donations from such diverse sources as the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, Du Pont, Fisher and Paykel, ASB Community Trust, Lion Foundation, the Logan Campbell Trust, Helitrantz, the Tindall Foundation and ENZA.

The Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi are appreciative of thousands of individuals who have given small donations to assist with the project. And to the many schools who organised fundraising projects to provide equipment for the island.

What do supporters do?

Other ways in which the SOTM are involved includes restoring historical buildings and equipment, cleaning, repairing and painting buildings, constructing and maintaining tracks and bridges, guiding visitors, removing noxious weeds, serving in the shop, cleaning and filling water troughs, helping researchers monitor nests, preparing for new bird releases, and many other wide-ranging activities. Whatever your talent, there is definitely something for everyone to do on Tiritiri Matangi Island!

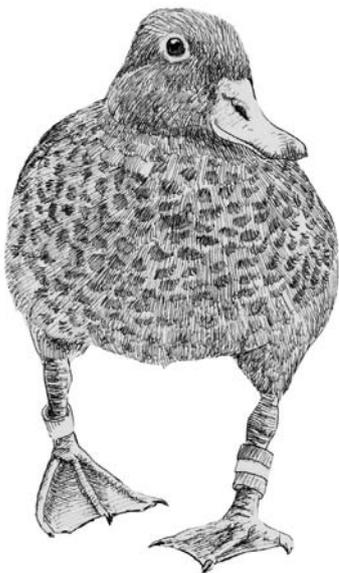
Working in partnership

The SOTM was one of the first community conservation groups in New Zealand, and in the 1980's it was unusual for the Department of Conservation to have the public so deeply involved in its work. Since then, 'conservation with communities' has become commonplace and DOC actively promotes and welcomes volunteer involvement. As the years have gone by, excellent rapport has been established between the SOTM and DOC, to the extent that these days quite a few DOC staff are members of SOTM and on their 'days off' work as volunteers. Some DOC staff started as SOTM volunteers, before working for the Conservation Department.

Join the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi

Become part of history

You will never regret it!



Tiritiri Matangi – a national treasure

The Tiritiri Matangi Education programme offers an authentic learning experience in a diverse context that can be fully integrated into the New Zealand Curriculum. To maximise and evaluate student learning we recommend an inquiry-based approach that links into prior learning at school and can be used as a reference point for assessment of ‘real life’ learning. Please take the time to engage in the following suggested journal activities. This can be done at all learning levels and using a variety of approaches.

Inquiry Learning Sequence: Tiritiri Matangi Island

Pre-visit activities

1 Ask the question: What do I know about Tiritiri Matangi Island?

To answer the question some suggested student representations might include to: draw a picture or one important feature; write keywords and then a description; tell a creative story – real or imaginary; start a very basic mind map; make up a song or poem; produce a wall poster; or start a web page.

2 Ask the question: What do I want to find out?

Students can come to the island with their own questions and/or research to be carried out. They can begin to think about the best way to find out their own inquiry – where to look and what skills they might need.

3 During the visit

Students to make a journal entry or drawing about some aspect of the trip. They might like to write about what they enjoyed the most or take notes on their own inquiry question.

4 After the visit:

Firstly re-do step 1. Answer the question: What do I now know about Tiritiri Matangi?

Then answer the following questions:

- What have we learned?
- Did we find answers to our initial inquiry?
- What’s the best way to present what we’ve learnt?
- What else do we want to find out?
- What are we going to do about what we learnt? This is the action component. Consider becoming involved in a local project.

Tiritiri Matangi timeline

1821	Kawerau people the iwi of the island. Also Ngati Paoa. Tiritiri Matangi abandoned by Maori after Ngapuhi, armed with New Zealand's first muskets, rampaged through the North Island.
1854	European farming began. Tiritiri Matangi cleared by fire for this.
1864	Lighthouse built in England and assembled on the island.
1865	January – first lighthouse in operation.
1939	Burn-offs halted for security reasons.
1964	Island burnt-off again.
1971	Farming lease ran out. Stock removed. Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board now in charge. Dr John Craig and Dr Neil Mitchell bring university students to study bellbird, tui, kiore and revegetation.
1974	First translocation of red-crowned parakeets.
1983	Seeds gathered from surviving trees on the island or the nearest source. Funding from WWF, Fisher & Paykel, ASB and John Logan Trust (\$40,000). Plant nursery built.
1984	First translocation of saddlebacks.
1984 – 94	Trees are grown from seed and planted by volunteers. Only 60 percent of Tiritiri Matangi planted to allow for species that prefer open habitats and to allow access for views.
1987	First translocation of brown teal ducks.
1988	Whiteheads first translocated. Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi formed following an idea by Jim and Barbara Battersby. Wharf road rebuilt.



1991	Takahe first translocated.
1992	First translocation of North Island robins.
1993	First translocation of little spotted kiwi.
1993	Kiore eradicated. Checks over two years confirmed total absence.
1995	First translocation of stitchbirds.
1997	First kokako translocated. Wharf rebuilt.
2000	Implement shed built.
2001	Fernbirds translocated.
2002	Start of project to build wetlands at the north eastern end of the island.
2003	First non-bird translocation – tuatara.
2004	Tomtits translocated. Visitor Centre opened.
2006	Duvaucels gecko and shore skinks translocated. Rangers Ray and Barbara Walter retired after more than 20 years as Tiritiri Matangi's conservation leaders.
2009	Rifleman translocated

