



Ratapihipihi Scenic Reserve - a sub-tropical rain forest

By Judy Eva

South of New Plymouth city is The Ratapihipihi Scenic Reserve - an outstanding example of a sub-tropical rain forest.

With dappled light shining through the nikau palms, kohekohe trees and tawa this lush temperate rainforest walk is very photogenic.

On this well graded short walk the track passes through coastal forest and past a small scenic waterfall. On the beginning of the track watch out for the two old sawpits on your right.

This pit is the remnants of a historical logging operation. Two sawers would alternate pulling a crosscut saw through the log, exhausting work, often the junior saw man had to go beneath standing in the water with sawdust constantly raining down on him. Up to 12 planks a day could be sawn.

The walk has more than just beautiful scenery it has great historic and horticultural value. Fifty acres of majestic and old bush is mostly an abundant growth of nikau palm. There is also miro and puriri. Special features bring several very old rimu trees, black tree ferns and native orchids. There were none out when we walked through.

It is remembered by the Maori as being a favourite spot in pre European times for hunting the kaka bird, hence where the word Ratapihipihi came from. In the time there were many groves of rata trees into which the young boys climbed carrying tame kaka. They would hide in the branches and imitate the call of the kaka by blowing through

Above left: Part of the Nikau Track walk.
Above right top: One of the few bridges in the Ratapihipihi Reserve.
Above right below: A small scenic waterfall.

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a leaf to make a pihipihi sound and as the birds settled they were killed with sticks.

The area came into prominence when a local builder Richard Rundle took on the task of building a schooner to carry New Plymouth's surplus of potatoes to Sydney.

To build his schooner Rundle milled the rata for the framing and the rimu for the planking in the Ratapihipihi area. The bush continued to be a favourite area for milling and you can see the two old saw pits in a good state of preservation on the right beside the start of the track. Rundle was also a bridge builder and it comes to claim that he built both the Patea and Whanganui river bridges with puriri taken from this area.

Until recent years the remains of the old bullock track with which the logs were hauled to New Plymouth was quite evident.

The bush was heavily milled until the Taranaki Scenery Preservation Society stopped it to protect the area for future generations.

The Department of Conservation now looks after the reserve. Fantail, tui, morepork, silvereye, bellbird, wood pigeon (kereru) and tomtits now frequent this unusual reserve.

Learn a little history of the area and interesting facts about trees and plants along the track through a series of information signs.

The track descends into the valley

Above right: Nikau Palm walk.
Below right: Root steps beside a tree.



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crossing a stream B on the map and passing the small scenic waterfall C on the map. The entrance to the reserve is A on the map. There is a picnic table in the reserve by the beginning of the track but it is in poor condition due to exposure to the weather.

The track is well graded and easy to follow but steep in places and there are steps some of which are exposed tree roots, is 1.9 km and takes up to one hour. There is an amount of climbing uphill out of the valley and could be a challenge for some.

From New Plymouth city follow Tukapa Street (Westown) for 5 kms turning right into Davies Road then into Cowling Road for 2kms. Ratāpihipihi Road is signposted on the right, a short drive along the lane to where the reserve is situated.

Due to the rural location the reserve is isolated, the parking is small and might be advisable to do the walk with company if you feel nervous about doing it on your own. It is well worth the effort to walk through this magical nikau forest.



Above left: Ratāpihipihi Reserve showing a picnic table .
Left: Some of the many stairs in the reserve.



Image: Connor Boyd, Mt. Cook

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