

## Introduction

Mt Pirongia (959 m) is the most widely recognised landmark in the 17,000 ha Pirongia Forest Park. An ancient volcano, its dramatic skyline and dark green forest contrast strongly with the surrounding farmland.

The mountain has always loomed large in the lives and traditions of people in the Waikato. It was first named 'Pirongia te aroaro o Kahu' (the fragrant presence of Kahu) by a tohunga of the Tainui canoe in honour of his wife.



To the north-west of Mt Pirongia, and also part of the Park, another ancient volcano, Karioi, rises sharply from the sea to 756 m. Altogether, four separate blocks of land make up the Park, which is managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Although protection of the Park's natural and historic values is paramount, there are also many recreational opportunities for visitors to enjoy.

## Plants and wildlife

Pirongia is the largest single area of forest remaining in the Waikato and is of considerable conservation value due to the variety of plant life and animal habitats available. Podocarps such as rimu and totara are found at lower altitudes along with tawa and tree ferns. As you go higher, the forest changes; hardy plants like kamahi and horopito are found on exposed ridges and, near the summit, thick mats of mountain flax, coprosmas and ferns are common. Northern rata and kohekohe are still present in the canopy but have been devastated by possums. Pest control programmes are now in place to help save these and other vulnerable species.

Native birds have diminished in number over recent years, but you are still likely to see grey warblers, fantails, tomtits, pippits, harriers, kingfishers, New Zealand falcons, kereru, tui, bellbirds and whitehead.

Several species of native fish and a huge variety of aquatic invertebrates are found in the Park's streams.

Dactylanthus, a rare and endangered plant, is found on the ridges of Mt Pirongia. It is New Zealand's only completely parasitic flowering plant — a root parasite with

no green leaves that grows partially underground. Many of the plants are caged to protect them from possums.



Cluster of *Dactylanthus taylorii* inflorescences breaking through the forest litter at Mt Pirongia in late summer. Photo: Des Williams, 2003.

## History

The Tainui people were among the first to settle in the Waikato. Their kainga (villages) and pa sites were at first based around the coast and inland wetlands but Pirongia was a useful hunting ground.

Unrest followed the arrival of Europeans and the garrison town of Alexandra (now known as Pirongia) was established in 1864, perched on the border between the colonised land to the north and the 'King Country' to the south.

European settlers soon began to burn forest for farmland and mill it for timber. But the mountains of Pirongia and Karioi became Crown Land and the forests were given some protection, though Forest Park status was not granted until 1971.

## Recreation information

### Access

There are many entry points into the Park. Some access ways cross private land (see main map). Keep to marked tracks and use stiles at fences. To protect the Te Awamutu water supply, access is not encouraged in the Mangawawa catchment.

### Wairake Track 2-3 hrs to the summit

This is the shortest route to the summit. Drive to a carpark off Ruapuke Rd then it's a 40-minute walk across farmland to the bush edge. From there the track climbs steadily through native forest to the summit. It is not as steep as sections of the Karioi Track.

### Te Toto Gorge Access Route 40 min to coast

The access route descends steeply from the northern side of the Te Toto Gorge carpark to join Te Toto Stream. The route follows the stream through kohekohe and karaka forest to open lands below spectacular rock formations.

## Restrictions

Domestic animals are prohibited in the Park. Permits for hunting dogs may be obtained from the Department of Conservation office in Hamilton.

## Pirongia Forest Park Lodge

Pirongia Forest Park Lodge, situated at the end of Grey Rd, is a residential outdoor education facility available for hire. For further information and bookings contact the manager on + 64 7 871 9570.

## Further information

Topographical maps for the Park are NZMS 260 series sheets R15 and S15. Caution — some tracks are incorrectly marked on these maps.

Waikato Area Office  
5 Northway St, Te Rapa  
Hamilton 3200  
PO Box 20025  
Hamilton 3241  
Phone + 64 7 838 3363  
Fax + 64 7 849 2658

Waikato Conservancy Office  
73 Rostrevor Street  
Hamilton 3204  
Private Bag 3072  
Hamilton 3240  
Phone + 64 7 838 3363  
Fax + 64 7 838 1004  
✉ waikato@doc.govt.nz

[www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

### Safety

The weather conditions can change rapidly, especially at higher altitudes. Always carry a change of clothing, wet weather gear and sufficient food to cater for any emergency.

### Fire

Fires are not permitted on the summit ridges (Ruapane through to the Cone, Mahaukura and Hihikiwi) or at the hut. Firewood is not available at the camp or picnic sites and visitors should carry portable cookers with them if required. During periods of extreme fire danger the Park may be closed to visitors.

### Water

The high level tracks on Pirongia and Karioi follow steep-sided ridges. Water is difficult to find, especially in summer, so you must take water with you.

### Picnicking

There are picnic areas at the end of both Corcoran and Grey Rds and alongside Kaniwhaniwha Stream on Karamu Limeworks Loop Rd.

### Camping

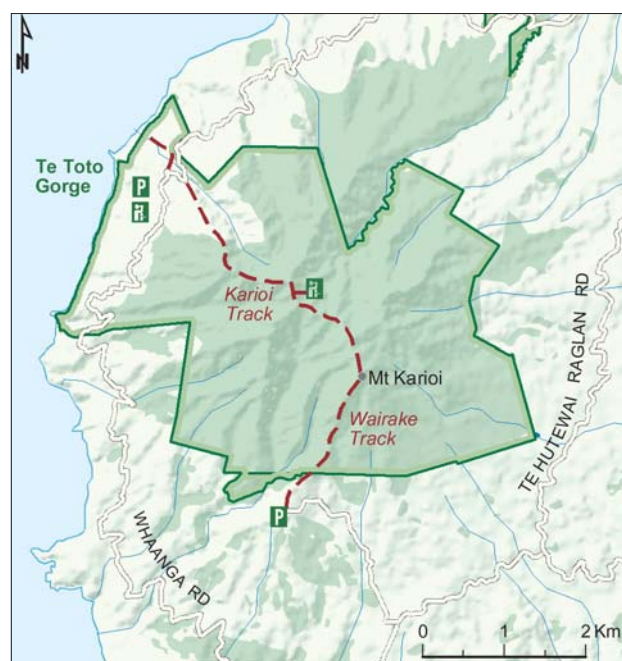
Pirongia has two campsites. One, with toilets, is situated in a grassy clearing, 45 minutes walk up the Kaniwhaniwha Stream. The other is a remote tramp/hunter site, halfway along the Bell Tack. Use of these sites is free.

### Pahautea Hut

This is the only hut in the Park. It sleeps 6-8 on two platform bunks. The hut has mattresses and a water supply but does not have a fire or cooking facilities. A camping shelter and campsites are located adjacent to the hut. Fires are not permitted in this area. Overnight visitors should carry their own cooking equipment, leave the area clean and tidy and carry all rubbish out. Hut tickets (\$5/adult, \$2.50/child) are available from DOC Visitor Centres, most DOC offices and retailers displaying the 'Backcountry Huts' sign.

### Hunting and fishing

Pigs, goats and possums are present in low numbers. Pigs are found mainly on the western side of Pirongia. Permits to hunt in the Park are available from DOC in Hamilton. Brown and rainbow trout are present in Kaniwhaniwha Stream. Fly fishing only is permitted.



## Karioi area

Karioi is a stunning mountain with spectacular views from the summit — on a fine day you can see Mounts Taranaki, Pureora, Maungamangero and Te Aroha. Closer at hand you can see all the local harbours as well and Mount Pirongia and Maungatautari.

### Karioi Track (formerly Te Toto Track) 3 hrs 30 min to summit, 3 hrs to lookout

This is the steeper but more interesting of the two summit tracks. Once over the stile at the start of the track it's all uphill but there are plenty of good vantage points where you can stop and admire the view. After walking through an open grove of kanuka you walk up a grassy slope before gaining the main ridge. Chains and ladders have been installed to help you negotiate the occasional rocky outcrop.

At the large rocky bluff the track sidles around to the north for a short distance then climbs steeply back to the ridge. From there it's 10 minutes to the lookout, signposted down a short side track. From the junction it's an hour to the summit along an undulating ridge. The vegetation along this ridge has been beautifully sculptured by the strong prevailing westerly winds.

# Pirongia Forest Park

\$1.00








Front cover: Tirohanga Peak. Photo: Bruce Postill.



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



## Track types

-  **Easy access short walk:** suitable for people of all abilities, wheelchairs and children's buggies
-  **Short walk:** well formed, easy walking
-  **Walking track:** well formed easy, longer walks
-  **Tramping track:** mostly unformed but have track signs and directional markers
-  **Route:** unformed, suitable for people with high level backcountry skills and experience

Many of Pirongia's tracks can be muddy, especially after rain.

## Track guide

### Corcoran Road Lookout 15 min return

A 100 m walk that is suitable for wheelchairs. Leads through forest from Corcoran Rd end to a picnic area and view point. Excellent views across the Waikato basin, distant Hamilton and Mt Te Aroha beyond.

### Mangakara Nature Walk 1 hr return

This walk meanders through an ancient forest with fine examples of rimu, kahikatea, tawa, pukatea and kohekohe. From Grey Rd carpark you descend to Mangakara Stream then circle back to the carpark. A factsheet, describing the features of interest on the walk is available on DOC's website or can be purchased from DOC's Waikato Conservancy office in Hamilton (address overleaf).

### Nikau Walk 2 hrs 30 min return

Start this easy walk at the Kaniwhaniwha carpark and follow the stream across farmland to a circular walk through beautiful native forest. Shortly after leaving the farmland you'll find a side track leading to a picnic/campsite clearing with toilets. There are many opportunities for swimming and picnicking along the stream edge. This walk can be combined with the Kaniwhaniwha Caves adding 30 min to the walking time.

### Kaniwhaniwha Caves 2 hrs 30 min return

The two limestone caves are near the start of the Bell Track, 5 minutes from the Nikau Walk junction. You can walk through the 20 m long main cave, except for a short hands-and-knees crawl. The cave is wet underfoot and torches are required. The second smaller cave is tight and narrow.

### Wharaurua Lookout (Mahaukura Track) 2-3 hrs one way

Start at the Grey Rd carpark and climb steadily through tawa forest to Wharaurua Lookout, one of the best viewpoints on Mt Pirongia. The last 30 m before the viewpoint are quite steep and chains have been bolted to the rock to guide your ascent/descent.

### Ruapane Lookout (Tirohanga Track) 1 hr one way

A steady climb from Corcoran Rd leads to Ruapane Trig. The excellent view extends across the Waikato Basin to the Kaimai Ranges.

### Ruapane Track 1hr 30 min one way

This alternative track to Ruapane Lookout starts at the Waite Rd carpark.

### Tirohanga Peak 3-4 hrs return

From Corcoran Rd carpark. Tirohanga Peak (pictured on front of this brochure) is a steep rock pinnacle on the Tirohanga Track 40 minutes past Ruapane Trig.

### Kahikatea Tree 6 hrs return

From the Kaniwhaniwha carpark follow the Nikau walk, past the Kaniwhaniwha Caves on the Bell Track, tramping alongside the Blue Bull stream to the tallest recorded kahikatea tree in New Zealand at 66.5 m high.

### Wharaurua Route 2 hrs one way

An alternative access to Wharaurua Lookout. Cross farmland from O'Shea Rd carpark for 30 minutes before reaching the bush edge. A steady to steep climb up a tawa spur leads to the lookout.

### Oparau Route 1 hr one way

From Pirongia West Rd this route follows a rough roadline across farmland to the Park boundary. The Oparau River is not bridged and can be impassable after heavy rain.

### Mangakino Route 1 hr 30 min one way

This route provides access to the Mangakino Block. Start at Vandy Rd carpark and follow the semi-formed Vandy roadline for an hour before crossing farmland to the bush.

### Walter Scott Scenic Reserve

This small reserve is owned by the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. Visitors are welcome to use the loop track (1 hour) which passes through beautiful bush.

## Summit tracks

### Mahaukura Track 4-6 hrs one way

From Grey Rd carpark follow the track to Wharaurua Lookout, then on for another 30 minutes to Mahaukura. The track undulates over small peaks and is uneven underfoot. From Mahaukura the track descends steeply before climbing again towards the Pirongia summit view tower.

### Tirohanga Track 3-5 hrs one way

The track starts from Corcoran Rd, climbs to Ruapane then traverses an undulating ridge on uneven ground, passing Tirohanga Peak, descending and climbing to the Pirongia summit. On a clear day look for Mounts Taranaki and Ruapehu in the distance.

### Tirohanga - Mahaukura round trip 8-11 hrs return

You can create an interesting round trip by crossing from Grey Rd carpark to Ruapane via the Mangakara Nature Walk, then following the Tirohanga Track to the summit view tower. Return via Mahaukura Track to Grey Rd.

### Bell Track 8-10 hrs one way

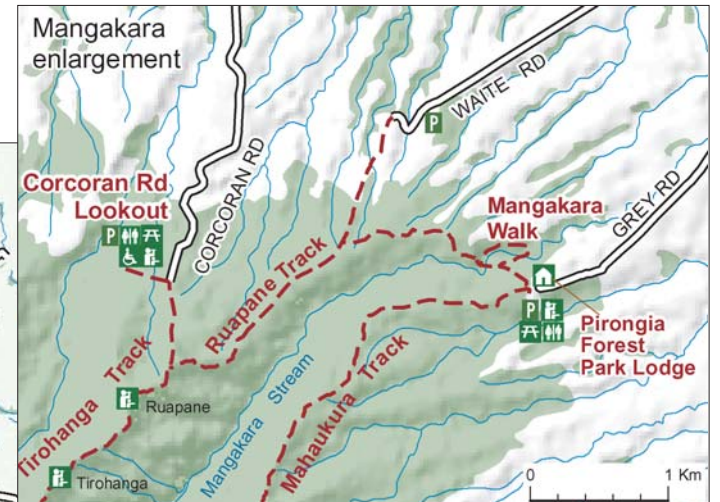
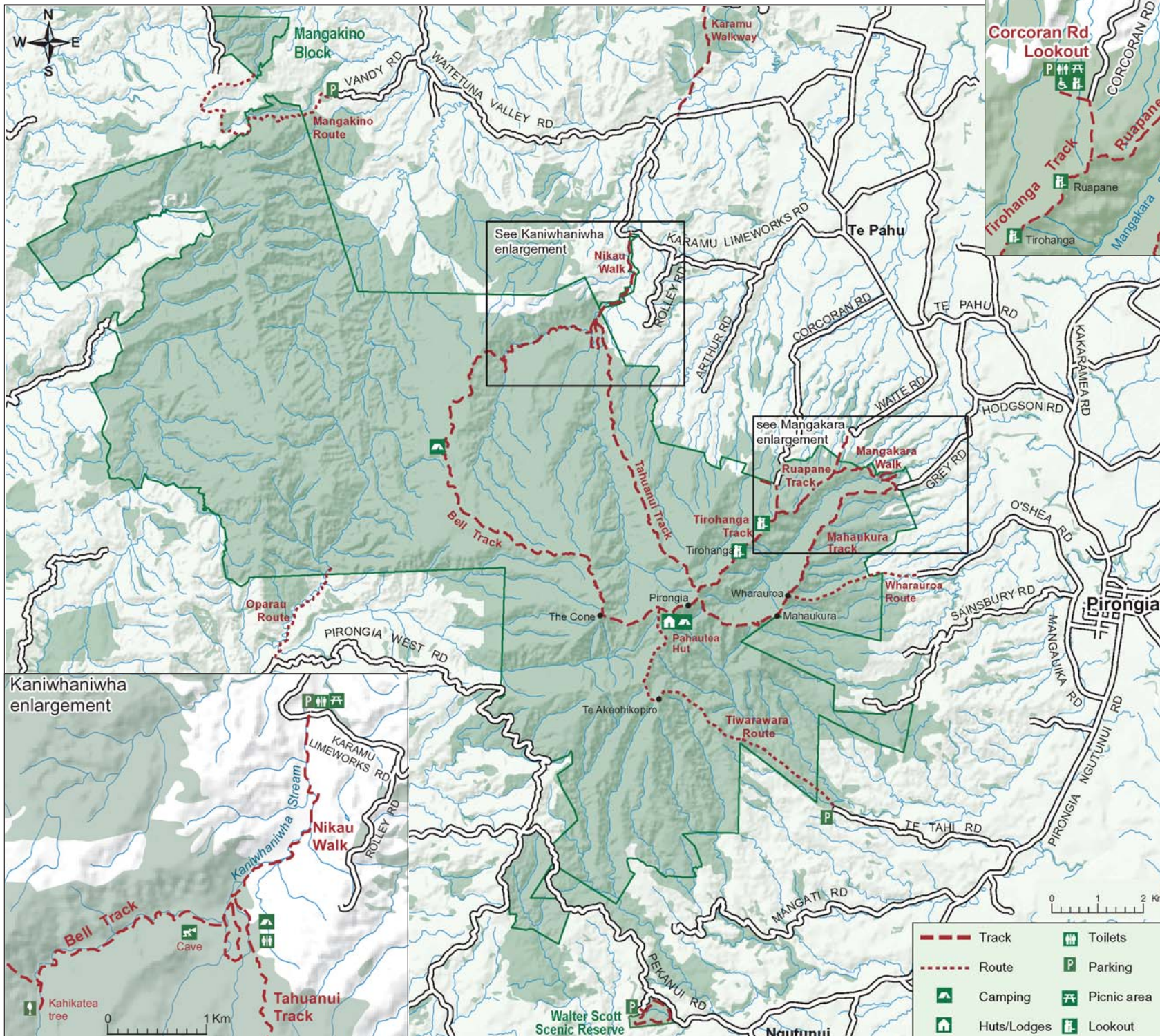
Starting at the Kaniwhaniwha carpark follow the Nikau Walk, past the Kaniwhaniwha Caves to the bridge just before the big kahikatea. From the bridge you climb a spur to a series of clearings. The last clearing, signposted as the halfway point, has a small stream nearby and is a good campsite. The track becomes muddy at this point and continues along the ridge to the Cone (second highest point in the Park) and then to Pahautea Hut. It is another 30 minutes to Pirongia's summit.

### Tahuanui Track 4-5 hrs to the summit

From the Kaniwhaniwha carpark follow the Nikau Walk to the campsite. The track passes the campsite toilets to the stream and climbs steadily up a ridge through stands of tawa to the summit ridge. The Tahuaniui Track can be combined with the Bell Track for a good overnight trip, staying at Pahautea Hut enroute.

### Tiwarawara Route 5-7 hrs to the summit

From the end of Te Tahī Rd this route climbs steadily to Tiwarawara with good views to the south. Continue via Te Akeohikopiro and Hikikiwi peaks to Pahautea Hut and the summit.



- NEW ZEALAND ENVIRONMENTAL CARE CODE**
- Protect plants and animals
  - Remove rubbish
  - Bury toilet waste
  - Keep streams and lakes clean
  - Take care with fires
  - Camp carefully
  - Keep to the track
  - Consider others
  - Respect cultural heritage
  - Enjoy your visit and *Toitu te whenua* (Leave the land undisturbed)

**DOC HOTline**  
**0800 362 468**  
 Report any safety hazards or conservation emergencies  
 For fire and search and rescue call 111