

PRESERVATION OF OUR NATIONAL SEASHORES

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SUMMARY: For many years New Zealanders had unrestricted use of large stretches of seashore and can be forgiven if they laboured under a myth of super-abundance. More recently it has become increasingly apparent that there is not an endless supply of coastal land nor are the undeveloped areas necessarily to remain open to the public. These changes are discussed along with the remedial action taken and the difficulties encountered.

INTRODUCTION

From their background training and knowledge, ecologists are expected to be concerned about our changing countryside and the incursions on nature which are taking place all around us. The questions you appear to be asking are whether this concern is shared by others outside your discipline; and if so, what efforts are being made to arrest or curb these intrusions?

I think the concern is shared by the public as a whole, though people are less well informed than they should be. Consequently, when they react to what they regard as intrusions into the natural environment, they do so in part from instinct and in part from selfish motivation.

In the New Zealander's interpretation of "The Democratic Way of Life" the right to use and enjoy areas suited to public recreation has an important place. He does not easily accept any restriction on the use and enjoyment of these areas whether it be through denial of access or by private ownership of the areas concerned. At the same time, the average New Zealander has grown up with a deep rooted respect for the right of the individual to use land he has purchased in any way he sees fit.

At times there is conflict between these two ideals, but this is not always clear-cut, and it is difficult to generalize on the subject when circumstances in particular cases have such a bearing on the issue. For this reason I will limit my discussion to my experiences in the preservation of the northern coastline.

THE GROWTH OF PUBLIC CONCERN AND USE OF THE NORTHERN COASTLINE

The awakening of public interest in the preservation of the northern coastline did not occur overnight. It developed gradually as a result of

increasing subdivision of coastal land and the sale of islands to private owners—in some cases to overseas interests.

When early subdivisions started to make their impact on favoured bays and beaches, the initial public reaction was regret. As the rate of subdivision increased, and whole stretches of coastline were affected with only the minimum statutory reserves being provided, the regret changed to concern.

Concern stemmed not only from loss of open space but also from the impact that the development had on the countryside. Destruction of trees and other vegetation, the raw scars left by bulldozers and in some cases the destruction of historic features, such as Maori pas on prominent headlands, all contributed.

Initially, most subdivisions were carried out by owners of the land—in many cases land which had been in the family for years. However, developers were quick to realise the potential market and have been very active in coastal areas for some years. Their activities helped further to stimulate public concern. In addition to subdivision, the North saw other attractive beaches and bays "gobbled up" by individual purchasers whose sole idea was to acquire areas for themselves and exclude the public. One northern land agent sold some of our most attractive islands and bays through his North American counterpart using coloured photographs and slides. The initial reaction of admiration for the agent's initiative turned to concern when the effects of his actions became apparent.

The North Auckland Land District has an attractive coastline with some hundreds of bays. It is commonly said that in the Hauraki Gulf alone a yachtsman can visit a different bay each weekend over a summer season without covering all the anchorages available to him. Further north, but still within easy cruising range over a holiday

period, are sheltered waters such as the Whangarei, Tutukaka, Whangaroa and Mangonui Harbours with the Bay of Islands and many intermediate bays.

The Auckland Regional Authority (1970) estimated that 16.2% of households in Metropolitan Auckland (28,800 people) own pleasure craft, and of these, 20% own more than one craft. The 600,000 people in Metropolitan Auckland own 35,500 boats.

These thousands of boat owners had come to take it for granted that they could use favoured anchorages and the land abutting them. In the main, the land owners had exercised little restraint over landing, and it came as something of a shock to the boating fraternity to find that some areas, which traditionally had been open to yachtsmen, were now "prohibited areas". Pakatoa and Rakino Islands in the Hauraki Gulf were two places where landing restrictions were imposed. Public reaction was immediate.

However, the loss of shoreline and landing places was only half the story. The increasing population in the Auckland region and predicted trends showed that the problem of today could become a crisis in the future. The present population of 600,000 is expected to reach one million by 1982-84. This population will be more mobile than ever before with not only more cars per head of population but more boats as well. The advent and the popularity of the trailer-boat have created problems in launching and landing facilities, to say nothing of parking, that were never envisaged ten years ago. In the Report on Recreational Boating in the Auckland Metropolitan area (A.R.A. July 1970), it was forecast that over the next ten years there will be an *annual* increase of 1200-2000 pleasure boats in the Auckland Metropolitan area bringing the present total of 35,500 to something like 50,000.

Forecasts such as these are making the Auckland public increasingly aware of the need to preserve the shoreline for the enjoyment of the community as a whole. The people are becoming increasingly concerned at the inroads being made into our remaining coastal resources.

REMEDIAL ACTION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Over recent years, the increasing concern over development of shoreline has caused several positive actions to be taken which help to alleviate the

problem. At local level the most significant of these was the constitution of the Auckland Regional Authority in 1963. Its Reserves Division immediately set about acquiring substantial areas adjacent to the sea for development as regional reserves.



The Authority was empowered to borrow two million dollars for this purpose, and to date it has spent about \$1.7 m. in purchasing reserves. These include 254 acres at Long Bay, 315 acres at Wenderholm, Waiwera, 928 acres of the Shakespear property on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula and 100 acres at Omana near Maraetai. It has assumed

control of the Centennial Park, a magnificent area of kauri bush in the Waitakere Ranges, and has purchased additional land to bring the total area of the Park up to 14,330 acres. Finally, it has just accepted control of the Muriwai Domain of 132 acres and will be taking over a further 5-mile strip of Muriwai Beach (containing approximately 1,000 acres) north of the existing Domain.

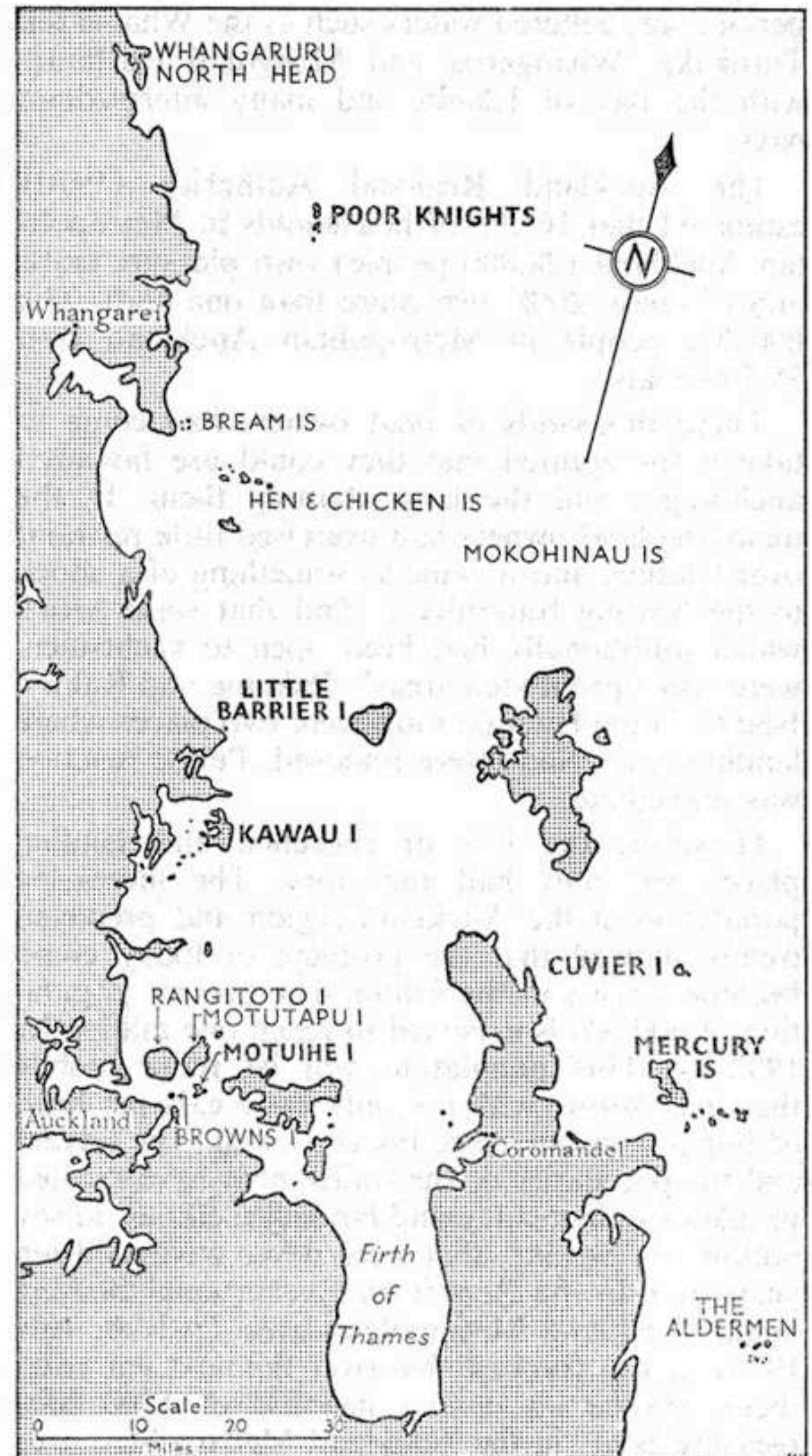
In addition to land acquisition and the development programme which followed, it has used very wisely the town planning procedures open to it under its own Act and has designated as regional reserves a further 261 acres at Wenderholm. This will help preserve the true rural character of the area. In the same way it has designated 1,400 acres on Takatu Peninsula, 765 acres in the Mahurangi Harbour and two areas of 52 acres and 168 acres east of Maraetai as reserves. These areas will be purchased as the opportunity arises, and legislative authority is being sought to borrow a further \$1 m. for this purpose.

North of the Auckland region, and centred on Whangarei, the Northland Planning Authority has been established. This Authority represents a voluntary association of local bodies in its area, but it has no rating revenue nor power to borrow money. It has a small planning staff and, even though it has not been able to purchase any land, it has been able to advise and encourage its member bodies to make wise use of the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act in trying to preserve scenic and historic areas.

REMEDIAL ACTION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Central Government played its part in passing two very useful pieces of legislation. The first of these (in 1967) established the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park. The Park consists largely of islands most of which are located in the Gulf proper — that is, inside Great Barrier Island — but its boundaries extend to Whangaruru North Head in the north and to the Aldermen Islands in the south.

The Park started with an area of 12,173 acres but now exceeds 20,000 acres. The bulk of the islands in it was owned by the Crown, but three local bodies gave up control of islands in their care while further islands, or parts of islands, were purchased as opportunity and finance permitted. Two groups of islands and part of another have been gifted to the Park. This is accepted as further



evidence of the public concern to see key coastal areas protected for future generations.

Islands in the Park comprise a mixture of conservation and recreation areas. On the inner Gulf islands, such as Moutuihe and Kawau, the emphasis is very much on recreation, although incidental to this the Park Board is very conscious of the need to preserve the natural resources of the area and is creating a wallaby sanctuary on Kawau. The species of wallaby known to be present on Kawau are:

1. *Macropus bicolor* (wallaroo). Not abundant, but seen over all of Kawau.

2. *Macropus dorsalis*. Very rare, if not extinct on Kawau.
3. *Macropus eugenii* (silver). The most numerous on Kawau.
4. *Macropus parma* (small brown). Almost extinct in Australia — thus international interest.
5. *Petrogale penicillata* (rock). Also present on Rangitoto.

Further out, the Board has such wonderful islands from the scientific point of view as the Poor Knights, Little Barrier, Cuvier and the Mercury Group (excluding Great Mercury). Most of them are flora and fauna reserves and rich in bird life. These islands are guarded jealously, and every care is being taken to preserve them in their natural state.

One of the most important actions taken in the short history of the Park has been the appointment of an ecologist to the staff of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in Auckland to initiate an ecological survey of the islands in the Park. The Board hopes the full survey will be completed during the next few years.

The second piece of legislation which has proved of great benefit in the North is the 1968 amendment to the Land Settlement Promotion Act. This legislation not only removed the threat of purchase of attractive coastal areas by overseas interests, but it had an indirect effect of stabilising prices by removing a class of purchaser to whom money was no object.

Finally, on the credit side, Government, through the Department of Lands and Survey, initiated a special survey of all coastal areas which might have scenic, recreational or scientific value with the object of establishing priorities for possible purchase by central and local government. Several key areas in the North have been purchased directly as a result of this survey.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

The public use of coastal land has not always been readily accepted by owners of land. In general, the average farmer is fairly tolerant, but thoughtless actions on the part of a selfish few have often led to restrictions on public access. We have the common example of gates left open, ewes disturbed at lambing and cattle frightened by undisciplined dogs. We have frequent experience of a thoughtless public picking mushrooms on private

property without first seeking the owner's consent and of the more sinister cases of people shooting stock, perhaps for "fun" or in some cases to remove a prime quarter of beef or veal.

It is small wonder that, in the face of these transgressions and the common legacy of litter, property owners sometimes rebel, but on the whole their attitude is one of tolerance and patience to and tramper and tripper. There is the refreshing example of an American who purchased an island in the Bay of Islands and made it clear that he would make the public welcome. One wonders how the public will react. Will they respect the owner's generosity or will they repay him with the usual array of rubbish and litter? The attitude of landowners generally is hardening in the face of continuing trespass aggravated by the greatly increased numbers who now invade their privacy.

The attitude of the city dweller is also hardening. In many cases he refuses to accept restrictions on access and may even show his resentment by acts of vandalism. Purchasers of 10-acre waterfront lots on Rakino Island visualized enjoyment of private beaches but they reckoned without the tenacity of the boating people who continued to land. By sheer weight of numbers they gradually forced individual land-owners to give up the unequal fight.

Acquisition of areas for reserves has also had its resultant problems. It is one thing to acquire the land but it is another to plan the area and find the money to develop it. Planning is the key to successful development and an impatient public sometimes chaffs at the delay between purchase and public use.

With the generally accepted need to protect our scientifically valuable areas and to provide future reserves for recreation, the attitude of some local bodies is at times surprising and disappointing. It varies from indifference, and perhaps reluctance to use the appropriate provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act, to active encouragement of subdivision with a view to increased return from rates, or perhaps some commercial development which might have scant regard for the aesthetic value of the land.

CONCLUSION

The average city dweller appreciates the need to preserve areas of natural environment and his access to them. This is confirmed by the public

support given to the New Zealand Countryside in 1980 conference organized by the New Zealand Institute of Engineers in 1967 and the Symposium on Coastal Development organized last year by the Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Surveyors. Nevertheless, the man in the street was initially slow to react to encroachments on the natural environment. "It was not the public that clamoured for the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park or the Auckland Regional Authority reserves but the public has come to acclaim both as a blessing." (Sayers 1969.) Now, however, the citizens' interest is aroused, and it is not likely to be easily allayed.

The citizen looks to experts for advice on technical matters. He can judge for himself the merits of subdivision against open space in an attractive bay, but he finds great difficulty in making a balanced judgement where issues are as complex as in the case of Manapouri. He welcomes a lead from scientists in these matters, but, in turn, he expects a dispassionate appraisal divorced from hysteria and based on relevant fact.

He regards the countryside as part of the natural heritage to be shared by all, and he resents disposal of the community asset for individual profit.

On the other hand, the land owner, who more often than not is a farmer, jealously guards the right of possession. He claims an inherent right to dispose of his land as he sees fit. He may pay lip

service to the rights of the community and preservation of the natural environment, but where his chance to make a profit occurs, principles too often go by the board. In too few cases does he see himself as trustee of a national asset to hand on to posterity.

In balance, the overall picture is not too depressing. No one will deny that there have been thoughtless and unwarranted depredations against nature in our comparatively young country, but we have not by any means reached the point of no return. While it is late enough, it is not too late to arrest the worst of the encroachments on our countryside and environment. Much has already been done to preserve the balance. While the man in the street must concern himself in these matters, and where appropriate take positive action, he expects a lead from technical experts. Despite appearances to the contrary he is aware of both the problem and the work being done to combat it. He appreciates the lead given by the scientist — especially when it is expressed in terms he can understand and evaluate.

REFERENCES

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