

Sandringham's Natural Heritage

Natural heritage ~ means the natural features, geological and physiographical formations, and the flora and fauna that make up an area. In other words it is the environmental history of a place.

So, what do we know about Sandringham's natural heritage?



Volcanoes and lava shaped Auckland and Sandringham

Sandringham lies between three volcanoes (out of a total of 53 volcanoes in Auckland):

Owairaka (Mt Albert)

Maungawhau (Mt Eden)

Te Tātua o Mataaho (Three Kings) also now known as Te Tātua o Riukiuta (Big King)

How do Volcanoes erupt?

On average there is a volcanic eruption in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, every 4000 years. It usually happens in a new place because each volcano is plugged with solid rock made out of cooled magma. Magma is extremely hot liquid and semi-liquid rock located under the Earth's surface. When magma flows onto the Earth's surface, it is called lava. The last volcano to erupt was Rangitoto Island 600 years ago, which was witnessed by Māori.

Lava once flowed from Owairaka, Manugawhau and Te Tātua a Riukiuta to Sandringham and beyond, and recent discoveries suggest that lava may also have come from as far away as Te Kōpuke / Titikōpuke (Mt St John) over 28,000 years ago. Many of the areas around Sandringham contain lava caves from these eruptions and rocks from the different lava flows have been identified. The area is also blessed with volcanic soil which is rich and easy to grow plants in – a boon for local gardeners. There are even records of red skies and eruption type climate changes in Ancient Chinese and Roman accounts, referring to the Taupo eruption of ~AD 186! Nearly 2000 years ago!

Did you know?

There are also many rocks from the lava flows to be found in Sandringham? Many of these rocks are porous (which means they are full of small holes that allow air or liquid to pass through them). Some of them even float in water! The more holes there are in a rock, the more gas there was in the magma when that rock was formed.



Māori pā on our local maunga

Volcano slopes were a good vantage point to position pā (village). Māori were able to defend themselves from invading parties and had a good view of any suspicious activity. The volcanoes were terraced by Māori for building and agriculture. Kūmara (sweet potato) middens or pits are still found on some volcanoes. Māori lived on Owairaka (Mt Albert), Maungawhau (Mt Eden) and Te Tātua-a-Riukiuta (Three Kings) among other volcanoes. The most extensively populated site was Maungawhau. Māori modified Owairaka to form a defensive pā featuring terraces, pits, ditches and banks.



QUESTION

How does the shape of Owairaka today compare to the painting below from 1845? Can you see any differences?

Next time you walk on Owairaka, why not look for evidence of quarrying and see what you can find?



Owairaka - Mt Albert prior to quarrying, showing its terracing for occupation and defence. Painted by John Guise Mitford, 1845.

Local maunga were quarried!

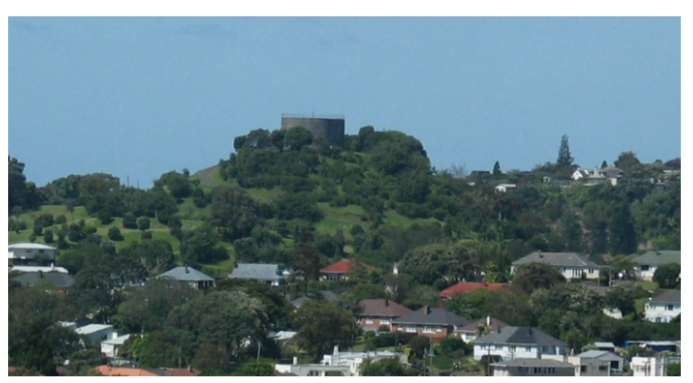
All three of the volcanoes surrounding Sandringham were quarried (mined for rocks) for either building, roads or railways by Pākeha settlers resulting in a change in shape and height. The sides of Maungawhau were quarried away.

Te Tātua o Mataaho has been reduced from Three Kings to just one, now known as Te Tātua o Rikiuta (Big King). And Owairaka is now shorter than it originally was.

You can see a big quarry at Te Tātua a Riukiuta next to Mt Eden Road. It is now being turned into a housing development. In fact, quarrying is why Three Kings now just has one King left - Te Tātua a Riukiuta (Big King). Can you guess why Big King was not quarried? (Hint, the reason is still visible, on its peak, look below!.)



View looking west in 1920, showing Mt Eden Road in the foreground and part of Te Tātua a Riukiuta. Highest King is in the background to the left with East King to its right.



As Owairaka is an important site of both cultural and natural heritage, when you are exploring

Please tread with care, keep to the paths and avoid walking on the slopes.

Feel free to share any cool photos or discoveries with us!

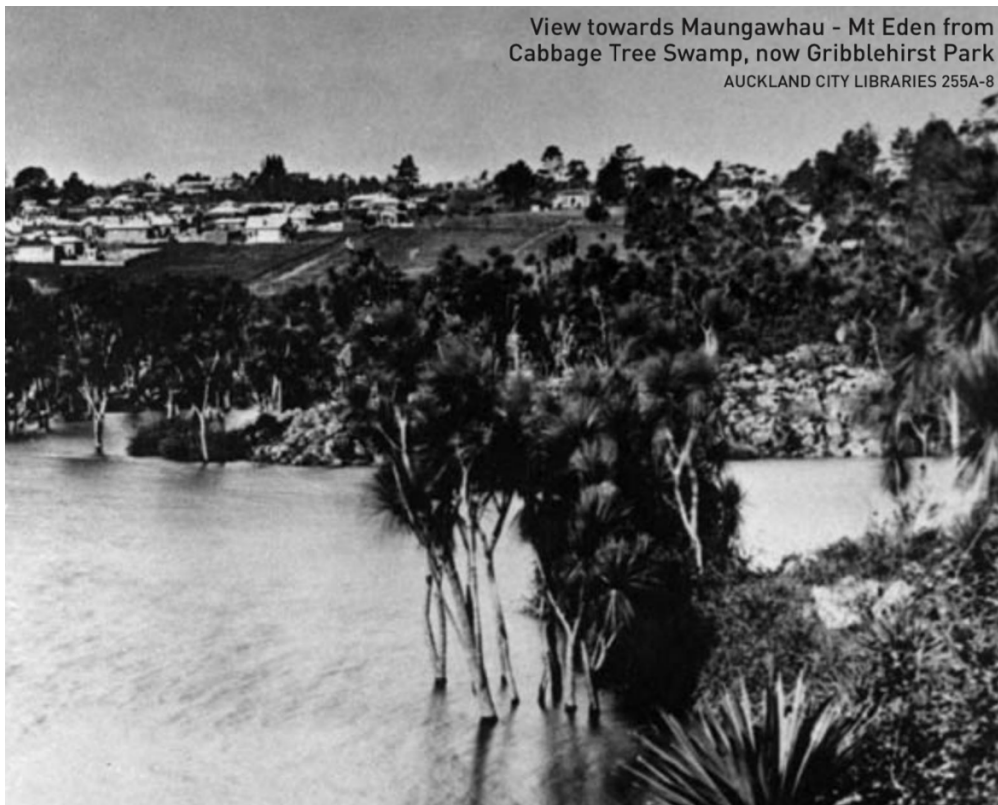


Ngā Anawai - The Watery Caves

As well as lava, plenty of rainwater also flowed into Sandringham from the surrounding hills because the area is low-lying. Eeling was a popular activity in the bountiful waters. And of course local children used to play here creating rafts out of found materials such as planks of wood or pieces of roofing iron to try and get across the ponds and swampy ground.

The area and local stream, Te Waititiko (also known as Meola Creek) were used for food gathering, hunting, collecting rongoā (medicinal plants), and collecting materials for mahi toi (the arts) such as weaving and dyes.

FUN FACT - Parts of Sandringham were covered in swamp in summer and in winter, there were large lakes of water so big that you had to take a waka to get across.



View towards Maungawhau - Mt Eden from Cabbage Tree Swamp, now Gribblehirst Park
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The local iwi called the area Ngā Anawai, “Watery Caves” due to the lava caves and tunnels. It was covered in cabbage trees and the swampiest part was called... Cabbage Tree Swamp - this part included Gribblehirst Park and Eden Park. Since then it has been drained to make way for dairy farm paddocks and eventually houses and a famous large stadium.

The name Cabbage Tree Swamp lives on in the road that runs through Gribblehirst Park, Cabbage Tree Swamp Drive even though the cabbage tree swamp it is named after is no longer there.

While the swamp has disappeared, a small pocket of lava rock forest remains in Gribblehirst Park. Though this too has been deforested and regenerated over time it gives us a sense of what Sandringham might have been like many hundreds of years ago. This lava rock forest is a rare remnant in Central Auckland and contains many interesting trees.

Make sure you download SPiCE’s [Gribblehirst Lava Rock Forest Walk](#), and our [Supermarket for the Birds](#) handout to help you explore this wonderful natural heritage in our neighbourhood.

