**RE-WRITING SOME WAITAKERE RANGES PARKLAND HISTORY**

When I wrote the chapter: “The History of the Waitakere Ranges Parkland” for the book “Waitakere Ranges”, published by the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society in 2006, I believed that the first public concern at what was being lost by the de-forestation of the Ranges occurred in 1894. In April that year, a large and influential deputation waited on the Auckland City Council with the request that it appeal to the Government to set aside a tract of undisturbed native bush in the Ranges as a public reserve. The Council urged that request on the government, with the result that in 1895, 5 separate blocks of forest reserves totalling 4932 acres were vested in the Auckland City Council “as reserves for purposes of recreation and for the conservation of native flora and fauna.”

I have recently discovered that the desirability of preserving the remaining bush in the Waitakeres had been raised in official quarters at an even earlier date. In her recently published book: “Into the West” Jan Barnes records that: “In October 1891 a letter was sent from the Department of Lands and Survey Wellington to the Commissioner of Crown Lands Auckland suggesting that the remaining Crown lands in that [i.e Karangahape] parish be reserved to preserve the bush.” She goes on to say that 8 allotments, totalling about 1100 acres were immediately withheld from sale and declared forest reserves.

That information prompted me to do some research. So I went to view the records held at the Government Archives in Mangere. There I was able to find and photograph the original document which made the suggestion. It reads, in full, as follows:  
 *MEMORANDUM*

*Department of Lands and Survey,  
 Wellington Oct 9, 1891  
  
To The Commr Crown Lands,  
 Auckland   
I think you should bring before the Land Board the desirability of reserving all the remains of Crown Lands in the Parish of Karangahape with a view to the preservation of the Bush. Though of little value – either land or bush– at the present time, this district will from year to year become of value as a place of recreation, easily accessible from Auckland. Moreover the preservation of the forest will prevent the streams from drying up.  
 [Signature and Status]*

Unfortunately I was unable to decipher the signature and status of the far-sighted individual who wrote that memorandum. Possibly the suggestion was made by a superior officer, or perhaps the idea originated in the mind of a politician.

I was also able to photograph:  
(i) a copy of the reply which the Commissioner sent to the Surveyor-General on 16th November 1891 in which he conveyed the recommendation of the Land Board that 8 particular Lots in Karangahape Parish “be set apart as forest reserves”; and  
(b) a copy of a memorandum from Wellington office to Auckland office dated 28th March 1892 stating that “Gazette of 24th  contains a Proclamation declaring the 8 Lots, having a total area of approximately 1150 acres, to be State Forests.   
I have also been supplied with a copy of the Proclamation. Five of the 8 Lots are small, scattered Lots situated in the Huia catchment. The other 3 form a block of 640 acres, situated north-east of Mt Donald McLean.

However, the 1885 Act was only a forestry conservation measure. It did not afford the full protection, nor did it have the long-term objective, which the writer of the 1891 Memorandum desired for the remaining Crown lands in Karangahape Parish. Its Preamble reads:  
 *“Whereas it is expedient to make provision for setting apart areas of forest land in New Zealand as State forests, and to subject the same to skilled management and proper control, in order thereby to prevent undue waste of timber, and to provide timber for future industrial purposes, and to provide for the proper conservation of climatic conditions by the preservation of forest growth in elevated situations: BE IT THEREFORE ENACTED....“.*  
And one of its provisions enabled the Conservator of Forests to grant logging rights.

But surprisingly, by the time the 1892 Proclamation was issued, events had led to forest reserves having some greater measure of de facto protection than management under the 1885 Act would provide. A report on forestry in New Zealand was published in the ‘Evening Post’ on 2nd November 1909 – refer to:  
<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=EP19091102.2.39>  
According to that report, a Forestry Department was set up in 1886, but was dis-established   
3 years later “in the drastic scheme of retrenchment which was necessitated by the financial embarrassment of the colony and the forests were once more *left to look after themselves*”. [My emphasis] The report went on to say that: “There is now no Forestry Department, but there is a Forest Branch of the Lands and Survey Department, whose functions are confined to the raising of trees and the planting of forest reserves.”

So it seems that after they had been declared forest reserves in 1892, the 8 Lots were not for sale by the Crown, and were “left to look after themselves”. But that situation did not last long. As already mentioned, in 1895, 5 separate blocks of forest reserves totalling 4932 acres were vested in the Auckland City Council “as reserves for purposes of recreation and for the conservation of native flora and fauna”, to be held under the Public Domains Act 1881. The 8 Lots were part of that vesting. The 5 “small, scattered Lots” mentioned above were all made part of one of those 5 ‘blocks’; and the other 3 Lots together formed another. Within a few years, those 8 Lots ( as well as most of the other land vested in 1895) were being managed as part of the Auckland water supply catchment area, and eventually they all became part of the present-day Waitakere Ranges Regional Parkland.

In 1891, an official in Wellington wrote that “*this district will from year to year become of value as a place of recreation, easily accessible from Auckland”.* It would be interesting to find out the reason why in response to his suggestion that Waitakere Ranges land should be reserved with a view to the preservation of the bush, the Lots were given the status of ‘forest reserves’. But, notwithstanding that first faltering step, in due course they became part of the great Waitakere Ranges Parkland we have today. His vision has indeed been amply fulfilled. His foresight should be acknowledged and he should be honoured for it.

Arnold R. Turner June 2010

