

# Standing tall for heritage

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At first glance the differences between a nineteenth century oak tree and a 2100-year-old colossal kauri in Northland are considerable. But delve a little deeper – even get to the root of the matter – and you'll find there are considerable similarities that make both trees significant in New Zealand history.



**Fig. 1** This English oak tree (*Quercus robur*), planted as an acorn in 1824 by Richard Davis at Te Waimate Mission House, Northland, is said to be the oldest in New Zealand. Photo: Stuart Park, NZHPT.

Trees are a key part of our heritage. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) recognises their significance through inclusion on its National Register (online at [www.historic.org.nz](http://www.historic.org.nz)).

The Register of historic places, historic areas, wahi tapu and wahi tapu areas identifies New Zealand's significant and valued historical and cultural places. It was established under the Historic Places Act 1993 and is the only statutory national record of our rich, significant and diverse heritage. The Register's size, scale and national focus make it one of the most important historical information resources in New Zealand.

The purpose of the Register is to inform the public, to notify owners of heritage values, and to assist in protecting registered places under the Resource Management Act 1991.

The Register currently contains more than 5500 individual entries. Included are historic areas, archaeological sites, sacred sites,

buildings, structures, monuments and memorials, public parks, industrial sites, agricultural sites and sites of significant events.

The oak tree at Te Waimate Mission House – the oldest English oak in the country dating from 1824 – is on the Register (Fig. 1). It is part of an extensive, registered historic landscape that includes buried archaeological deposits, other standing structures and natural features. The colossal kauri, Tane Mahuta (Lord of the Forest), at 51.5 metres high and 438 cm in diameter, is part of the Waipoua Sanctuary – afforded protection through the Department of Conservation (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** Tane Mahuta (Lord of the Forest, *Agathis australis*) of the Waipoua forest is the largest kauri by volume (244.5 m<sup>3</sup>). Photo: Yolanda Vogel.

Big or small, it doesn't matter. The message is that trees and gardens have just as much heritage value as buildings and other structures.

So, how does a living treasure qualify for NZHPT registration?

Nominations are sent in by the public and, if accepted, they become proposals. Public consultation and submissions follow before the NZHPT completes an internal process to decide on registration.

The assessment criteria are broad. Places may be included on the Register if they possess aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historic, scientific, social, spiritual, technological or traditional qualities. Places sacred to Maori in the traditional, spiritual, religious, ritual or mythological sense are called wahi tapu and wahi tapu areas and these are also included.

Trees are likely to be registered for their historical, cultural, traditional, spiritual, wahi tapu or scientific values. They may enhance heritage values associated with places that have

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the above values – and relate to other assessment criteria, including aesthetic value. Who could imagine Wellington's Antrim House – home to the NZHPT – without its garden and trees? Or Woodlands in Gordonton, where several trees planted in the nineteenth century grow in its grounds including, reputedly, the largest camellia, tulip and gum trees in New Zealand?

Trees on the Register are found in a variety of guises – in private gardens, public parks and botanic gardens, orchards, as a single tree or in groups. There are many examples, such as:

- Mansion House on Kawau Island where Governor George Grey surrounded his house with extensive gardens of imported trees and plants.
- Oak Avenue Historic Area in Hastings is a 1.4km stretch on Omaha Road of which recognition has been afforded to 211 English oaks, 41 elm trees, 40 plane trees, three lime trees, four cedrus and three redwood trees.
- Plimmer's Oak within the South Lambton Quay Historic Area in Wellington. The oak is believed to have been grown by prominent Wellington businessman John Plimmer in what was then his garden, during the mid-nineteenth century, possibly from an acorn given to him by Sir George Grey.
- Riccarton House in Christchurch which has adjoining native bush associated with it, gifted to the city by the Deans family in 1914. Riccarton Bush is the only surviving stand of wetland podocarp forest in Christchurch, and is dominated by kahikatea.
- Tomanovitch Cottage in Kaurau Valley is a fine example of an early settler orchard. The site of Pietro Tomanovitch's orchard, where apples, pears and plum trees remain, also features large poplar and several mature oak trees.

Trees also have significant cultural and/or traditional value, acting as markers, landmarks or memorials. One wahi tapu example is Te Karaka Tapu o Ngapuhi in Waitangi, a karaka tree – surrounded by a stone wall – used as a marker indicating

the area further upriver where the kaitiaki (or guardian ancestor) of Ngapuhi resides. It also is a symbol of continued spiritual protection and guardianship for nga hapu o Nga Puhi.

Another example is Te Pou o Tainui Marae of the Ngati Kapumanawawhiti hapu in Otaki that has historical and spiritual significance. The totara was a gift to the marae community from King Tawhiao in 1860 and carries great reverence. There is a kaitiaki, or guardian, associated with the tree that is often described as having a lizard form.

While the NZHPT recognises the importance and significance of identifying, promoting and protecting heritage, our regulatory powers are limited. Registration is an identification and recognition tool and does not provide protection in itself. Protection can be afforded by local councils through listing in their District Plans and resource consent may be required for pruning or removal. Some councils have protected single trees, groups of trees, or gardens as part of their heritage schedules, recognising their historic, aesthetic or landmark values. In some places trees are tagged to distinguish them from non-protected trees.

It is also important to protect heritage trees from adverse impacts from the nearby surroundings – visual impacts and also direct physical impacts on the health of the tree. The oak tree at Te Waimate Mission house has a covenant between the owner and NZHPT that restricts activities around the tree, including no excavation, pruning or other planting without NZHPT consent.

History, and heritage, comes in many guises, with trees an essential part of that fabric. The pear tree, planted in Kerikeri in 1819, is believed to be the oldest fruit tree in New Zealand (Fig. 3). Reverend Samuel Marsden, leader of the Anglican Mission in the Bay of Islands, brought trees from Australia on his second visit here in 1819. Reverend John Butler took charge of the new mission station and in 1819 supervised the planting of 100 fruit trees – including pear and orange.



**Fig. 3** This pear tree (*Pyrus communis*), growing at Kerikeri, Northland, was planted in 1819 and is purportedly the oldest known fruit tree in New Zealand. Photo: Alan Jolliffe, NZHPT.

But standing tall over all is Tane Mahuta, whose roots have anchored this country for more than 2000 years, and gives us all a real grounding in sense of place, belonging. That's part of the power of trees, and is the reason why they rightly are identified, their values recognised and conserved for future generations.

Nicola has worked for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust for more than 10 years in a variety of roles from Heritage Planning Adviser, as Registrar, and to her current position in the Policy Team. Graduating with an MSc in Resource Management and a BSc in Ecology, Nicola brings botanical experience to her strong heritage background. In her role as Registrar, Nicola was responsible for the Trust's registration process and the maintenance of the NZHPT Register of historic places, historic areas, and wahi tapu areas.