

# The Kaimai Concept

## Improving Outdoor Recreational Opportunities in Kaimai Mamaku Conservation Park From Backwater to Stomping Ground

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### Background

The Kaimai range is a band of hills providing a dramatic boundary between the Waikato and the northern Bay Of Plenty. The range provides the spine of the Kaimai Mamaku Conservation Park. Conservation Parks are public lands managed by the Department of Conservation so that their natural and historic resources are protected and public access and enjoyment facilitated.

The Park is of significant historical interest (especially kauri extraction and various mostly fruitless mining ventures), and has high conservation values, including an array of unusual forest associations including New Zealand's most northern stands of red and silver beech and Kauri stands still present in some isolated valleys.

The Park has huge recreational potential, being within 2 hours driving for over half of New Zealand's population.

### The Concept

To significantly upgrade the tracks, huts and campsites throughout the Park so that they support a much greater use for single day and multi day hikes by virtue of having many different options of a predictable duration and standard, and suitable for a range of fitness levels.

This paper outlines a 5 year plan to improve and maintain the tramping track, hut and campsite network in the Park. A group of tramping and other outdoor clubs is being established to develop this plan.

The core of the network is proposed to be an upgraded 4 day tramping track from Wairere Falls to Karangahake Gorge (the Kaimai Ridgeway).

The outer parts of the network would include the following:

- Established DOC maintained tracks, including other sections of the full North South Track
- Tracks used by clubs to access the Kaimai Ridgeway - Clubs may typically maintain those accesses closest to where they are coming from
- The network of tracks around Waitawheta Hut – this fantastic area is not proposed to be part of the Kaimai Ridgeway route, to avoid clashing with existing heavy usage, but provides options for users completing the Kaimai Ridgeway

## Kaimai Concept

A challenge for the group is to design and run a project that focuses and retains volunteers. Providing a clear vision, and a 5 year plan to get there is seen as a way of creating this commitment and ownership of the project by volunteers.

The group recognises that a project on public conservation land must be managed sustainably in the long term.

The group is keen to work closely with DOC, the NZDA and the FMC, to refine the proposal, ensure all issues, or potential roadblocks, are understood, and to access funding originating from DOC's Community Conservation Partnership Fund.

It is envisaged that the project will start in 2014/2015, with track cutting and marking activities, and doing a full survey to refine ideas on potential hut or camp site locations and requirements.

## Current Usage of the Park

It is currently used primarily by day walkers and tourists on the northern and western sides (most notably in the vicinity of Karangahake Gorge, Te Aroha and Wairere Falls), and by overnight walkers on the eastern side of the range, particularly accessing the popular Waitawheta Hut.

Deerstarkers also use the Park and actively maintain several small huts in the centre of the Park. Recreational facilities are deliberately less present towards the southern end of the Park, areas of which are maintained as remote experience zones.

The Kaimai range itself provides a rugged tramping environment. The ridge tops especially provide great views to east and west, and south towards the volcanoes of the central North Island.

The current multi-day tramping opportunities are centred on the "North-South" track, advised as a 5 to 7 day traverse the length of the Conservation Park. The track however is not popular. The tracks and huts are of inconsistent standard (or size), and in places are inappropriately spaced. The route mostly avoids the open ridgeline that would more positively reward trampers for their efforts.

Current typical use by a local tramping club could be summarised by this report from the Auckland Tramping Club:

*"The Kaimai area is in good day trip range from Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga and surrounding localities – the ATC runs a number of regular favourites there through the year, and every 2-3 years we run an overnight trip – this only receives moderate patronage, in good part because there are not many options for multiple groups of 6-8 people to do a variety of trips. Even our day trips generally get less patronage these days because they are the same every year."*

### Proposed Network

Much of the tramping network in the Kaimai Mamaku Conservation Park already exists. The improvements and additions that the group is proposing serve to link what is there together in a more coherent whole, and bring back into use older tracks that access some now infrequently visited superb locations.

#### Kaimai Ridgeway

Starting Wairere Falls, finishing Karangahake Gorge, creates appropriate distance for a challenging 4 day tramp, scenic start and finish locations with well-established visitor facilities and parking.

1. Day 1: Wairere Falls to Kauritatahi, 12km
  - Spectacular Wairere Falls
  - Superb mountain streams north of the Falls
  - Fully remark and recut the overgrown Old NS track up onto the ridgeline, past Puketutu hut and along to Kauritatahi Hut
  - New hut needed. May need new hut site if current hut is to be retained, or current site is unsuitable



From the old NS track between Kauritatahi and Puketutu, looking south

2. Day 2: Kauritatahi to Te Rereatukahia 12km
  - all established track, more regular maintenance required
  - includes the most spectacular section of the new NS track between Thompsons track and the hut, being on the ridgetop - including some ladder sections, exposed rocky outcrops, and views to both sides of this narrow part of the Range



The little Kaimai ladder mid way along this section

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3. Day 3: Te Rereatukahia Hut to Mangakino Shelter / new hut 16km
- Of this, 11 km is currently unmaintained track and needs re-establishing.
  - Past the notable landmark of Wahine Rock
  - Along the western lip of the range above and around the head of Wairongomai Valley
  - Review Mangakino Shelter area for possible new hut
  - Avoids the 500m descent + 450m ascent of the new NS alternative to this route



From Baldy, north of Te Rereatukahia Hut on the Old NS track, looking south along the tops of the range

4. Day 4: Mangakino Shelter / new hut to Karangahake Gorge, 16km.
- Established tracks, some ongoing maintenance required
  - Joins the popular easy day walk down the lower Waitawheta River
  - Café finish !

### Additional Subjects for Consideration as the Planning Progresses

1. Tracks to / from Mangamuka Hut – Te Tuhi or new NS track(unknown state)
2. Check all other DOC maintained tracks – most are good most of the time
3. Consider hut / campsite options for the North South Track when done as an easier 7 day tramp. Potentially includes new, upgraded or existing
  - Hurunui Hut
  - Wairere Falls campsite upgrade ?
  - Kauritatahi Hut
  - Motutapere Hut OR Te Rereatukahia Hut
  - Mangakino Shelter / Hut OR Waitawheta Hut
  - Daly's Clearing Hut
4. Obtain agreement for (on boundary) use of the area of land to the west of the top of the Puketutu to Kauritatahi ridge and east of the Maurihiro Scenic Reserve – Maori owned land
5. Note that maintenance undertaken on the wider network will very much depend on which tracks that clubs build a connection with, either independently or through using them to access the Kaimai Ridgeway.

### Action Plan

1. Concept discussion with DOC, FMC, NZDA to make sure the concept meets with approval, and if there are any concerns, that solutions are devised collectively
2. Extend communications with clubs, to refine the concept into a firm plan, to gather more information and to identify and reconcile any user conflicts
3. Formalisation of how the project will be managed between clubs and identify the primary contacts for work parties.
4. Submission to DOC, and the Outdoor Recreation Consortium, of draft 5 year plan, complete with first year projects and funding requirements
5. Reconnaissance of all Kaimai tramping tracks / routes to provide up to date information and GPS data. Rough marking of sections that are to be fully marked and cut in the first year. Also including identification of any significant obstacles that might need contractor funding to overcome
6. Liaison with DOC to refine 5 year plan including:
  - Finalising route of the Kaimai Ridgeway, including hut locations, track/hut standard specifications, and camp site opportunities, including sites to be used as a base for early work parties.
  - Which clubs, or other groups, are taking responsibility for what aspects of the project.
  - Volunteer support and skill development.
  - Completing DOC Management and H&S paperwork.
  - Reporting requirements for work undertaken.
7. Planning of Club work parties (involving assigning of responsibilities to multiple clubs) to mark and clear approved tracks.
8. Club work parties in the hills on their assigned responsibilities
9. Review and reporting of completed work and ongoing maintenance priorities
10. Fundraising to achieve outcomes of 5 year plan that can't be funded by CCPF funding.

### Five Year Plan

Wider network actions to be added as clubs identify their priorities and commitments. Most establishment activity completed in the first four years, with year 5 settling into primarily an ongoing maintenance activity

#### Year One

- Survey of all Kaimai tramping tracks, identifying maintenance priorities, track re-opening requirements
  - o Outcome – we can identify quick wins, immediate needs, and get people working
- Identification of supporting clubs, and allocations of tracks to them for regular maintenance / monitoring
  - o Outcome – getting the community involved to help themselves
- Kauri Grove Track, Pahiko to Pukekohatu (2) Track marking and cutting – for the section of Kauri Grove Track that avoids the kauri trees (only one of the 2 legs of the track is needed to get up to the ridge – if the kauri section is limited to one area, we should be able to avoid / protect it
  - o Outcome – new round day trip from Wairongomai Valley for a fitter group



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- Overall survey of Kaimai Ridgeway route
  - o Using track information to plan shorter and longer through trip options
  - o Identification of currently used campsites that need a toilet
  - o Identification of possible hut locations
  - o Outcome – essential information for forward planning / discussion of options
- Identification / confirmation of immediate priorities that can provide visible results
  - o Outcome – better forward plan, allowing better costing and scheduling of work
- Trial Floating Track installation
  - o Determine costs, installation requirements, effectiveness
  - o Possibly on some of heavily rutted section near Te Rereatukahia hut
  - o Outcome – confirm this is a viable approach for the protection of some of the more delicate areas of the tracks to be re-established
  - o Outcome – immediate noticeable improvement for users of the NS track
- Determine site and construction for new Kauritatahi Hut
  - o Commence site preparation
  - o Outcome – working to address issues because current Kauritatahi hut will increasingly become a popular overnight destination
- Creation of signage that identifies the track care responsibility to the Kaimai Connection – erection of signs once a group has taken on responsibility for an area
  - o Outcome – make all track users aware that the community is out there helping itself – and that they could join the effort too. Also provide info for reporting new maintenance work required (EG immediately following a storm)
- Look at different options for self logging of visitor numbers at huts / campsites
  - o Outcome – we will all be keen to get good info on usage, collect feedback, involve people

### Year Two

- Pahiko to Te Rereatukahia. Track marking and cutting
  - o Outcome – opens up day 3 of the Kaimai Ridgeway
  - o Outcome – another superb ridge back up to tramping standard
  - o Outcome – another multi day round through / trip involving some combination of Wairongomai, Tuahu, Wharawhara / Waitawheta
- Kaimai Ridgeway Wairere Falls to Kauritatahi Hut. Track remarking and cutting
  - o May require additional follow up work for the more boggy area S of Kauritatahi Hut ?
  - o Discussions with Maori landowners for the west side of the ridge
  - o Outcome – additional Kaimai Ridgeway section that takes people to Kauritatahi Hut along a superb ridge
  - o Outcome – provides day 1 as intended for the Kaimai Ridgeway
  - o Outcome – provides a new 2 day round trip option back to Wairere Falls carpark using the NS track and this section of the Kaimai Ridgeway

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- Continued maintenance of tramping tracks now in the maintenance programme
  - o Outcome – maintenance of the standards established in Year One
- Construction of new Kauritatahi Hut
  - o Outcome – provides an expanded overnight destination
- Confirmation of action to be taken for the Mangakino shelter / Pukekohatu area
  - o Outcome - Planning for a weather and visitor number tolerant overnight destination for night 3 of the Kaimai Ridgeway, also for an alternative through trip from Wairongomai to Karangahake

### Year Three

- Track maintenance Kauritatahi Hut to Te Rereatukahia hut
  - o Outcome – if not already picked up by a club before now – needs to be up to standard tramping track standard, and catering for continually growing undergrowth in some sections
  - o Outcome – Consider adding appropriate signage and more formal markings to the DC3 crash site – aim is to educate, learn, and respect
  - o Outcome – work to overcome the rutted track sections immediately around Te Rereatukahia (Unless that can be costed up and implemented sooner – currently quite challenging, especially after a long day's tramp)
- Continued maintenance of tramping tracks now in the maintenance programme
  - o Outcome – maintenance of the standards established in Year One
- Commence construction of Mangakino Shelter / Pukekohatu area hut
  - o Outcome – preparations for catering for a wider range of use for the various different interest groups passing through
- Commence promotion of the Kaimai Ridgeway as a new tramping option in the Kaimai Range
  - o Outcome – marked increase in visitor numbers and national visibility of this special area

### Year Four

- Remark and cutting on the link track through Cashmore Clearing
  - o Outcome – track and soil protection for an increasingly useful link track
- Determine whether the old Cashmore Clearing hut site is suitable for re-establishing a hut or a campsite
  - o Outcome – not many places to stay overnight in this locality – so look to provide somewhere that best suits the environment of the area
- Maintenance work on some of the rougher sections of the NS track south of Wairere Falls (if not already done by this point)
  - o Outcome – maintenance of the standards established in Year One
  - o Outcome – brings the NS track up to the same standard, supporting a longer through tramp (5 or 7 days)
- Continued maintenance of tracks within the maintenance programme
  - o Outcome – maintenance of the standards established in Year One

### Year Five

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- Ongoing programme of tramping track maintenance across the Park
  - o Outcome – maintenance of the standards established in Year One
- Maintenance requirements review and implementation for link tracks
  - o Outcome – if these haven't already been picked up in earlier years by various clubs
- Potential to supplement maintenance with biodiversity conservation projects where appropriate
- Ongoing programme for monitoring usage, needs, problem areas
  - o Outcome – sustainable maintenance and development programme continues

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