

MT EDEN - AN AUCKLAND VOLCANO

First-time visitors to Auckland may be surprised to find that this, the largest city in New Zealand, sits on a volcanic field. And geologists tell us the field is *not* extinct.

Volcanic fields such as Auckland are where small eruptions occur over a wide geographic area, and are spaced over long periods of time (thousands of years). Each eruption builds a new single new volcano, which does not erupt again.

Mount Eden is an example, one of Auckland's most famous landmarks and one of nearly fifty volcanoes within a 20-kilometre radius of the city centre. Rangitoto Island is another.

Mt Eden – known in Maori as Maungawhau - is the highest volcano on the Auckland isthmus – 196 metres - and a great vantage point for looking out over the city and the Waitemata Harbour.

It's also well worth a visit for its historical interest. Hundreds of years ago, when the Maori migrated to this country, numbers of them settled in what is now Auckland. They settled, by choice, close to the volcanic cones, making use of the rich, fertile soils for gardening and taking advantage of the steep-sided cones as defensive pa. Auckland's volcanic cones are believed to have been used as occupation sites from the 14th century: they became increasingly fortified from the 17th century.

Evidence of this past Maori activity can be seen, including terraces, pas (or villages) and food storage pits, at a number of archaeological sites. Impressive and complex earthworks of a pa can be seen on Maungawhau, itself. The final development of such sites may have taken generations, because all earthmoving was done by hand, aided only by stone and wooden tools.

Probably even more numerous than the pa are other earthworks associated with dwelling places and food storage. They include: terraces which were built primarily as house sites, and later developed for defensive purposes, platforms and numerous types

of pits.

Maori cleared large areas of volcanic stone to develop garden plots, moving soil from exposed areas to artificially deepen the garden soils.

The rocks cleared from the lava stone fields were used in several ways. Stone walls were built to mark pathways through garden systems or as house foundations. Volcanic rocks would also be heaped up and covered in soil: the rocks heated the soil and made an extended growing season possible. Other uses included row alignments, platforms, pavements, sub-surface drainage systems, houses, shelters, stone-faced pits and terraces, stone-wall defences and retaining walls. You will see evidence of these things here on Mt Eden.

In the 18th century, the Waiohua people from the Tamaki (Auckland) isthmus were forced to abandon their pa after invasion by the Ngati Whatua, who came from the Kaipara district. Then, in the 1820's, Ngapuhi raiders from the north came, wielding muskets, forcing the Ngati Whatua to move on. European settlers arrived soon after and it's reported that, for a time, the isthmus was virtually deserted (Jamieson, 1992). Massive landscape changes followed this, and the isthmus eventually developed into the modern city of Auckland.

Maori name: Maungawhau, 'Hill of the Whau Tree'.