

WAITOMO WESTWARD

Mac's Quarry or Paryphanta Cave

Mac's Quarry is a small dry cave on the Waitomo- Te Anka road, 12 kms west of Waitomo. It is known for the important finds of subfossil bird and Molluscan remains found in the cave between 1968-1978: total of 29 species of bird and land snail as well as reptile and amphibian bones (skink and native frog).

In 1968 subfossil shells of the giant land snail *Powellyphanta* (61cm) were discovered in this cave resulting in the cave being renamed Paryphanta Cave. These specimens were the first recorded from Waitomo (there have been a number of subsequent finds in various caves in the region including Waipuna and Piripiri caves).

Among the bird bones recovered from the cave were those of a large extinct coot or waterhen (very rare), owlet-nightjar (extinct), takahe, kakapo, and stitchbird, to name just a few. Fossil pollens extracted from sediments within the cave indicate they were laid down around the time of the last glaciation approximately 19,000 years ago.

Mangapohue Natural Bridge (Te Koipu)

A spectacular stalactite encrusted double limestone arch spanning the Mangapohue stream, clothed in original lowland rainforest. The natural bridge is the surviving remnant of a once massive cave system. In its walls and the outcropping within the adjoining *karst* fields, can be seen beds of the giant fossil oyster, *Gigantostrea wallastani*. The 5.5metre arch is known to support a colony of the rare New Zealand long-tailed bats.

Karst

Within the 5.5 hectares of the Mangapohue Reserve is a spectacular range of *karst* features. Karst is a distinctive landscape of arches, caves, dolines, sinkholes and springs. Karst is a limestone region in Northwest Yugoslavia, which now gives its name to similar areas throughout the world.

Piripiri or Goddards Cave

Among the first Europeans to visit/explore Piripiri Cave was Frederick Mace, of Glowworm cave fame, who visited the cave in the 1880s. There were many others who no doubt followed in his footsteps, among them a geologist and speleologist, Peter Barret. In 1962 he found the bones of a 35 million year old fossilised whale together with the remains of a fossilised shark in the cave. The cave has also contains the most spectacular beds of the giant oyster *Gigantostrea wollestani* to be found anywhere in the region. The cave has also yielded subfossil remains of the giant land snail *Powellyphanta* and bones of the moa *Anomalopteryx didiformis*. Like many other caves in the region, Piripiri also supports colonies of glowworms and cave weta.

Marokopa Falls

This spectacular waterfall (35 metres) is by far the largest of several in the area. It is the result of the combined volumes of the Mangapohue stream and Marokopa river plunging over a Jurassic mudstone and conglomerate escarpment. In addition to being admired by European visitors as one of New Zealand's most spectacular waterfalls, Marokopa Falls was regarded by pre-European Maori as a spiritual taonga. The falls are a classic example of the way in which some waterfalls originate.

The river has down cut and dissolved its way through the limestone and not the greywacke basement upstream from the falls but this down-cutting is held up by a hard thick conglomerate bed at the lip of the falls. Downstream the river has very rapidly cut out deeply into the softer siltstones. The conglomerate is undercut, now and then unsupported slabs fall off, keeping the falls vertical.¹

Ngahuinga Bluffs

Towering above the rural settlement at Te Anga is a series of spectacular limestone bluffs known as Ngahuinga Bluffs. The name Ngahuinga means the 'place of gathering'. In pre-European times, Maori people travelling over ancient trails from Waitomo to Kawhia would meet with canoe parties travelling up the Marokopa River. The bluffs contain a number of small limestone caves; some known to contain moa bones, while others were used in former times by local Maori for burial purposes. Beyond the limestone bluffs lies the Puriroa Stream – at the headwaters of which some ancient Maori rock paintings are located.

Kiritehere

At the Southern end of Kiritehere Beach rise massive outcrops and shore platforms of triassic mudstone containing a spectacular deposit of the bivalve *Monotis*, of which there are many varieties. Fossils of this ancient member of the scallop family may be found in triassic rocks around the globe as they flourished world-wide during this period before vanishing in the great extinction at the end of the triassic period. These rocks also contain other species such as the mussel-like bivalve *Manticula* and various species of ancient brachiopods or lamp shells. Lamp shells are not actually molluscs, but a distinct group of very ancient lineage more akin to bryozoa.

¹ An excerpt from: 'A Trip Through Time: A guide to landforms Waitomo Caves – Marokopa' by Peter Chandler: Published by the Waitomo Caves Museum Society