

## Crater Hill

The Unitary Plan Independent Hearings Panel has largely agreed to a proposal by the owner of Crater Hill to build up to 575 houses on one of Auckland's most prized volcanoes under a mix of low and medium density re-zoning. This has alarmed environmentalists and other stakeholders, such as Civic Trust Auckland, the Volcanic Cones Society, the NZ Geoscience Society and multitudes of concerned individuals.

Civic Trust Auckland is concerned about the lack of due process involved, the rejection of past local and regional protection and rejection of the proposed continuance of protection afforded by the PAUP. It considers this land the best candidate for regional park status, with the volcano and immediate surrounding land deserving of waahi tapu designation.

CTA is of the view that the land is unattractive for housing, as it is situated nearly in line with and quite close to the proposed second runway of the Auckland International Airport.

The volcano has no known Maori name. A crude translation of the present name could be **Puketomo** and the chair of our Volcanic Landform Protection Sub-committee, Munroe Graham, has during the last decade proposed that name for future adoption.

This land feature comprises a classic "castle and moat" type volcano within a surrounding tuff ring (which extends a short distance beyond the site in question). The bulk of the volcano is located on the southern portion of Tidal Road, beside the south-western expressway, just to the west of Aorere College in Papatoetoe.

It is a delightful landscape feature and the Geoscience Society in its recent press release notes, "It has recently been ranked as the eighth most-valued volcano in an assessment of potential sites that should be included in a UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination (for Auckland). It is the best preserved tuff volcano in Auckland with the best example in New Zealand of a lava lake that has partly drained back down the volcano's throat at the end of the eruption. It has a text-book crater lake, within which is a small island made up of solidified remnants of the drained lava lake. All other tuff volcanoes in Auckland have had their outer slopes built over and if the recommendation is accepted, Crater Hill will be added to that list of shame".

This release was drafted by Bruce Hayward, a geological heritage expert, former member of NZ Conservation Authority and author of the book, *Volcanoes of Auckland – the essential guide*. He further noted that Crater Hill was recently ranked eighth most-valued volcano in a report to the Ministry of Culture and Heritage assessing the case for a proposed nomination of the Auckland Volcanic Landscape as a World Heritage property potentially containing up to 21 separate volcanoes. The higher ranked volcanoes are Rangitoto, Motukorea, Mangere Mt, Maungakiekie, Maungawhau, Maungarei, and Otuaataua Stonefields.

### **A shocking history of local and central government neglect**

Notwithstanding many pleas from citizens for volcanic landscape protection since 1840, lack of robust controls and destruction has been and remains ongoing, much of it by the governing bodies themselves. For a few of many examples; the Devonport local authority demolished Takararo (Mount Cambria), beside Takarunga (Mt Victoria) for road metal, similarly Rarotonga (Mt Smart) was demolished to provide metal to form Great South Road and ballast for the main trunk railway. Owairaka (Mt Albert) was heavily quarried by the railways and Wiri Mount almost entirely demolished, also for railway works.

From the Te Tātua a Riukiuta-Three Kings Heritage Study produced for the Puketāpapa Local Board in August 2015, some of the lost opportunities have been highlighted and are included in the following partial summary.

During the debate over the One Tree Hill Reserves Bill on 17 June 1886 (New Zealand Parliamentary Debates. Vol. 54. May-June. 1886, p. 555), Sir Maurice O'Rorke said: "About 1845, when Sir George Grey first came to the colony, all the volcanic hills about Auckland, except, he believed the Three Kings, were dealt with in the same way - they were all reserved as public parks: Mount Hobson, Mount Eden, Mount Wellington &c." In fact only the largest few were so reserved.

A petition to Parliament was made in 1914 from the Mayor of Auckland and other mayors of the region asking the government to intervene to protect the volcanic cones around Auckland from further destruction. The petition pointed out that the volcanoes had been described by Dr von Hochstetter as "true Volcanic Hills which, although extinct and of a small size, are perfect models of Volcanic Mountains" and Auckland Isthmus is "one of the most interesting districts of the globe". The mayors were of the opinion that; "It is desirable on national grounds that steps should be taken forthwith to preserve these Hills from further destruction and inasmuch as the problem is beyond the means of local bodies to solve, it is necessary that Parliament should intervene."

The end result was standard practice for a government unable, or unwilling to make decisions. It called for an investigation and the matter was forgotten.

In 1928 the Town Planning Association prepared a booklet on Auckland's Volcanic Cones (copy held by M L Graham). Most of this was written by G.M. Fowlds, who continued to advocate for the preservation of the cones, writing to the Commissioner of Lands as late as 1956 saying, "As your department is the custodian of the national estate I presume it is interested in the preservation of reserves on the volcanic cones in the neighbourhood of Auckland," and, "I am deeply disturbed by what is happening." He was referring to the tremendous demand for scoria which had resulted in the opening up of quarries on a number of hills that had "hitherto not [been] interfered with."

This, of course, is not a complete history of failed efforts by any means, but it could also be mentioned that even today (2016) in supposedly more enlightened times, Auckland Council is scandalously proposing to sell land incorporating a remnant of South King (one of the Three Kings complex) for housing and in the south, the site of the demolished portion of Wiri Mount is being prepared for industrial development. A small remnant is in the control of the Maunga Authority, yet another industrial subdivision is underway immediately to the north of Wiri Station Road, with apparently no plans to allow for improved public access to the nationally important and protected lava cave passing under the road between these three parcels of land. At Otuataua, council is allowing housing on the stonefields, which, as noted above, are ranked by the NZ Geoscience Society seventh within the region, just ahead of Crater Hill itself.

Far from becoming more habitable, the city faces death by a thousand cuts as its administrators give the impression of sleep walking into the future. The attitude of government is incomprehensible, bearing in mind that members of parliament representing people in the region make up a significant portion of that ruling body.

#### **The CTA effort in the last decade**

About 2006 our then President Munroe Graham convened the Volcanic Landscape Protection Sub-committee. As far as Crater Hill is concerned, that committee made a direct appeal to Sir Barry Curtis, then Mayor of Manukau City, with a follow-up to his successor, Len Brown, to attempt to secure the volcano into public ownership. These efforts received encouraging responses and significant funds were accumulated. However, it appears that following amalgamation, local funds have been dissipated region-wide and that nothing now remains.

The owner of the adjoining market garden was interviewed and expressed his willingness to allow part to be incorporated into any proposed park. This could be of critical importance, as it would allow public facilities on level land away from the important landform itself, thus preserving the mana of the feature.

Actions by CTA and other public interest groups have been ongoing through to the present.

Funding could be made available by abandoning unnecessary roading projects, for example, the proposed east-west freeway from Onehunga which will cost a fortune yet appears to serve hardly any purpose and will in itself be environmentally damaging, also, by the way, further degrading the volcanic explosion crater at Gloucester Park (one of the two food bowls of Mataoho).

**Compiled by: M L Graham**