



OUR WORLD
with **Gerry Brackenbury**
(29 October 2009)



HOW ironic. As the National Government prepares to mine our national parks, they are also proposing a national park for Northland, based around our province's symbol, the kauri tree.

Only 2% of the kauri estate now remains in Northland, and guess what? They have recently discovered a disease that can potentially finish off the last of these rakau rangatira.

It is called *Phytophthora taxon Agathis*, or PTA, but more simply known as kauri dieback. It is killing trees in Trounson Park, Waipoua **Forest**, Great Barrier Island (where it may have started) and around Auckland in the Waitakere Ranges.

It is a nasty fungus-type disease or pathogen that may have come from the tropics.

It is found in the soil and is spread in water or on tramping boots. Pigs and goats are also vectors.

It is an evil disease that kills trees from saplings through to trees the size of Tane Mahuta.

At the moment, several agencies have got together to address this potential threat to our mighty kauri, including the Department of Conservation, Northland Regional Council and Biosecurity NZ.

To discourage the spread of this disease, they suggest the following: when in Kauri forests, stick to the tracks, having washed your boots first. Significant trees need to have their roots protected by boardwalks or especially designed tracks. As we speak, kauri trees in **Pukenui Forest** on the edge of Whangarei are having built these special tracks with attendant signage.

DoC has committed a lot of money to protect kauri in Northland so we don't inherit an ex-Kauri National Park. There is a web-site to find out more via the NRC and an 0800 NZ KAURI phone number.

There are many books published about the kauri (I own about six), by authors such as AH Reed, CV Sale and Joanna Orwin.

A whole museum is dedicated to the tree and its history, and tourism has also jumped on the bandwagon.

Kauri, once home to bats and kokako, are slow-growing conifers that can survive for more than 1000 years. They are a living link with our country's ancient past.. They belong to the Araucariaceae family that stretches back 200 million years to the age of the dinosaurs.

It is a southern hemisphere species that dates back to the supercontinent of Gondwanaland, which includes Australia, South America, PNG up to Malaysia.

Araucaria include familiar trees like the Norfolk Island pine and hoop pine from Australia.

The kauri family appeared about 130 million years ago and has about 12 close cousins, five of them growing on New Caledonia alone _ the British really should have pinched NC before the French ... think of the fun we could have had!.

The kauri story, both natural and human, is a great tale.

The Latin name is *Agathis Australis*. ``Agathis" meaning a ball of string because of the shape of the seed cone. Our responsibility is to ensure that now, and into the future, that thread never runs out.