

The Crimson Corridor

In 1998, a student listening to the song of a lone bellbird at Mount Maunganui College asked where all the native birds had gone. From this grew the commitment to bring native birds back by planting flowering native trees. Guided by the concept of biological corridors, the students began with 500 cuttings struck from local stock of 'the Mount' and, over the next four years, they set about planting over 2,000 pohutukawa throughout private homes, public parks and the extensive sand dune network along the coast.

The students' Crimson Corridor will generate much magic for the future. It is a long-term commitment – another outstanding example of local business, council and community working together.



Pohutukawa

Photo: John Crawford

Meridian Energy is New Zealand's largest generator of electricity. The partnership with Project Crimson reflects our commitment to Keeping New Zealand New by using only renewable forms of generation, such as wind and hydro. We are privileged to live and work every day amongst New Zealand's awe-inspiring natural environment, at Manapouri, the Mackenzie district, and Te Apiti. We feel equally privileged to be able to support the Trust's goal of renewing the splendour of pohutukawa and rata for future generations.

Find out more about northern and southern rata at www.projectcrimson.org.nz

Why Project Crimson?

Once, long ago, pohutukawa forests would have turned coastlines and hillsides red. This is unlikely to occur again.

The introduction of the Australian brushtail possum, together with human development, not only destroyed the forests but threatened the species itself. Worse still is the pohutukawa's sensitivity to fire and its inability to regenerate in pasture grasses or weeds when stock is present.

Through a wide range of programmes to educate and inform, through community partnerships, widespread planting and possum eradication programmes, Project Crimson seeks to enable pohutukawa to flourish once again in their natural habitat.

This Crimson Trail is one of a series of Crimson Trails to be identified by Project Crimson throughout Aotearoa New Zealand – one that readily allows you to see our national icon for yourself.

Each Crimson Trail is unique to its region, presenting either pohutukawa or rata (northern and southern) or both, according to location within New Zealand.

What the Crimson Trails share is that special time of the year when glorious crimson blooms cloak the trees and the wind-blown stamens carpet the ground all around.

Crimson Trails can be explored in the following areas:

North Island (Te Ika a Maui)

Auckland
Coromandel
Mount Maunganui
Rotorua
Wellington

South Island (Te Waipounamu)

Golden Bay
West Coast
Otago Southland



Brochures for each Crimson Trail are available from Department of Conservation offices, local Information Centres and can be downloaded from Project Crimson's web site.

For further information about Project Crimson and the Crimson Trails:

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Mount Maunganui is one of the most perfect places to set out on a Crimson Trail that celebrates the pohutukawa. In fact there are few accessible places in New Zealand where you can see so many pohutukawa in such a concentrated area.

This Crimson Trail starts out on Mount Drury, diverts briefly to Moturiki Island and then continues along the delightful boardwalk toward Mauao (Mount Maunganui). The entrance to the camping ground signals the beginning of a spectacular section of the Crimson Trail around Mauao.

Discover for yourself one of the Bay of Plenty's real treasures and while you're in the area it's also worth visiting some places of special significance to Project Crimson and discovering the depth of community ownership of special projects.

CRIMSON TRAIL MOUNT MAUNGANUI



Photo: Simon Taylor

The Pohutukawa

It is frequently referred to as the 'New Zealand Christmas Tree' and, for many New Zealanders, the pohutukawa dominates favourite landscapes and childhood memories.

The pohutukawa belongs to the myrtle family (*Myrtaceae*) and to the genus *Metrosideros*, the iron hearted myrtles, which is a reference to its hard, very heavy, dark red heartwood.

There are two native pohutukawa (mainland and kermadec).

Growing

The pohutukawa has a massive spreading crown. It's wider than it is tall. Roots form out of trunks and branches and the roots are able to grow in air over surfaces as they search for crevices, pockets of soil and moisture.

Living

Dormant leaf and floral buds are protected against damage from cold, salt and abrasion by bud scales. Leaves are hairy when young, but once mature the hair on the upper surface is replaced with a tough, shiny coat of wax, protecting leaves against drought and salt.

Flowering

Pohutukawa trees crimson our coastline between November and January. Individual flowers are arranged in dense clusters, each of which has around 14 large, red 'brush' flowers that stay open for around seven days.

PLACES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

On the main highway between Auckland and Tauranga, quite close to Waihi, is the well-signposted Waihi Beach turn-off. Take this road to the north end of Waihi Beach and you come to the Orokawa Scenic Reserve track. This is one of the country's most spectacular coastal tracks and it leads to Homunga Bay.



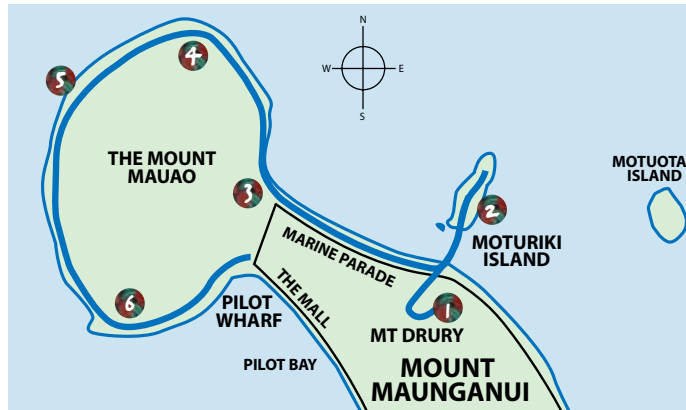
Orokawa Bay

Photo: Duncan Jones

In 1989 Homunga Bay had one of the most severely damaged pohutukawa forests in the Coromandel. Together the Department of Conservation and Project Crimson undertook fencing, possum and goat control, and started replanting. In 1993 they opened a scenic walkway so people could see the progress of the restoration project. Today, rather than using the reserve for winter grazing, the local farming community operate the bait stations and take pride in the extraordinary turnaround in the fortunes of the pohutukawa in Homunga Bay.

This sense of community ownership and pride in the long-term benefits of planting restoration and regeneration can also be seen at Te Puna Quarry Park on the outskirts of Tauranga where, since 1997, volunteers have been transforming an old quarry site into a marvellous botanical wonderland. Here, with Project Crimson's support, young pohutukawa take their place in the native planting areas.

Mount Maunganui's Crimson Trail



The Trail starts in Mount Maunganui at the foot of Mount Drury.



Mount Drury is really a very little hill – a gentle five minutes up and three minutes down. Around 20 metres from the start of the Trail, on your right, you'll find a huge old pohutukawa with masses of aerial roots. Unlike this old giant, the majority of the pohutukawa on Mount Drury have been planted within the last 50 years.



Moturiki is only an island on the highest tides and a natural path takes you across the beach to its rocky western end. The track along the length of Moturiki presents another gentle stroll and as you head to its highest point you'll see that the tiny island to your right, Motuotau, is completely covered in pohutukawa. Companions in wheelchairs can join you now on Marine Parade to complete the Trail.



Photo: Simon Taylor



'Round the Mount' starts at the camping ground entrance where the local council has placed an impressive and very informative display sign. Here you learn more about Mauao, and the constant threats to the pohutukawa growing on its slopes.



The Trail path is wide and well walked by young and old alike. It's a lovely stroll that will take approximately one hour, and from the path you can marvel at the tenacity, the 'cheek' even, of trees that will put their roots down in eroding banks and rocky crevices. Here you'll see first-hand how pohutukawa will colonise almost any surface above high tide, and how re-growth occurs in sproutings from bare roots.



Shortly after the plaque commemorating the shipwrecking of the Ranui, you'll come to a seat marked 2. The seat is located in a grove of pohutukawa and this grove gives you some idea of how the trees would have grown in the past, before fires, possums, and humans began periods of destruction.



As you make your way around Mauao on the 'homeward journey' to Pilot Bay you may just glimpse the bronze statue of Tangaroa – god of the ocean – which stands out at sea, both on guard and in greeting.

In a gentle two hours you will complete this Crimson Trail, which is a delight year-round. The sea always in sight and the pohutukawa plentiful. You'll be truly rewarded if you choose to take the Trail from late November to early January.