

TRAVEL & ADVENTURE



□ Panorama of Lake Waikaremoana, from the top of Panekiri Bluff.

— PICTURE / William Pearce

Mystical amid mist

Paihia's **William Pearce** explores the history and beauty of one of New Zealand's wildest national parks — Te Urewera — and makes a surprising discovery about its name.

WHATEVER YOUR historical standpoint or perspective on the New Zealand Wars, there can be no denying that Te Kooti knew where to hide. Pick up a map of the North Island and just above Hawke's Bay you will notice a small lake nestled inland within a bed of green and attached to the interior of the island by what looks like a long meandering umbilical cord.

This is Lake Waikaremoana in Te Urewera National Park, one of the last remaining areas of original native forest in the North Island and historic homeland of the Tuhoe people.

In his marauding heyday, Te Kooti hid out in these ranges and befriended the locals while colonial troops fighting their way through the bush in pursuit were

picked off by his rifles. Nowadays, thankfully, the forest is a touch more peaceful and hopefully there is not much chance of getting clipped by a rogue sniper, unless of course you are a possum.

THE TRIP to the lake begins with a drive, a long one for us as we started in the Bay Of Islands — 10 hours door to door.

However as the lake is only three hours from Rotorua I guess that would make a more obvious choice of base.

I was doing this walk with my father, who was visiting from Scotland, and a friend of his from Christchurch. We had scheduled 3½ days but the walk is easily done in three. In fact, we met people en route who were doing it in two.



□ Dawn breaks at Lake Waikaremoana.

— PICTURE / William Pearce

We had decided to take it relatively easy to give us time to enjoy our surroundings which, after all, was why we were there. We had also opted for what some might call the soft option, but I like to think of as the more civilised approach — we'd had arranged for our packs to be delivered from hut to hut by the water taxi.

Not only did this make the walking a lot easier but it also allowed us the luxury of having a nice bottle of pinot noir each night to complement our lovely cuisine de tramp.

THE FIRST section of the walk is by far the hardest. As soon as you are off the water taxi you are climbing, easily at first but then the track changes as you get into the bush and begin to follow the ridge line toward Panekiri Bluff.

It is very uneven underfoot with roots across the path and some big irregular steps needed but the views whenever you get them are breathtaking. We had

miraculously chosen three picture postcard days to undertake this walk and were rewarded with clear views right across the park.

Once the hardship of Panekiri is conquered, the walk follows the lake, meandering around the many inlets and bays, occasionally climbing over a small saddle or two but generally just gently undulating along through variations of fern groves and beech and podocarp forest.

It is an exceptionally pleasant walk. Though the path is fairly irregular at points, it is pretty well maintained with a good squad of Department of Conservation rangers carving new steps and looking after the bridges.

EACH morning began in a stunning fashion with the lake reflecting the deep pinks of the dawn as the mists ran off the land and scurried around the water's surface. They would cling to the lake and the forest until long after the sun was up and warming the air, making for an eerily beautiful start to the day.

The Tuhoe people used to be referred to as the Children of the Mists and after one morning by the lake one can understand why.

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□ A sole trampler atop Panekiri Bluff soaks up the views across Lake Waikaremoana and the Urewera Ranges.

— PICTURE / William Pearce

Advocate

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Mystical amid the mist



□ Toetoe at dawn over over the misty lake.

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As the day advanced the lake waters became crystal clear and every now and then it was possible to glimpse a nice fat brown trout slowly cruising the shallows, making me wish I'd had the foresight to pack a telescopic fishing rod.

The lake is renowned in the area for its trout fishing and can get quite busy in the height of summer; however, during our walk the only thing there in numbers were the black swans.

All along the track a couple of them were always gracefully sliding along, giving us a wary glance as they sporadically paddled the shimmering water.

Now, I know that black swans are fair game in this country and some people refer to them as pests, but there's no denying they are exceptionally graceful birds as they glide regally around the lake.

THE UREWERA National Park is 2127sq km in size and was created in 1954 to preserve this magnificent native forest for posterity.

Due to its isolation it was one of the last areas to come under British control and as we walked there it was easy to see exactly why. The



track occasionally leaves the lakeside and heads through dense native forest giving us a small taste of what it must have been like for the men in red coats.

Fortunately for us, however, there is now a well-defined path to follow and an absence of fanatical colonels whipping us along.

Maurice Shadbolt, in his book *The Season of the Jew*, writes of his English hero, Captain Fairweather, meeting the Tuhoe at a lake high in the mountains and it is only too easy to imagine it being Lake Waikaremoana.

Whatever the historical truth, there is no getting away from the

fact that this is a naturally beautiful and deeply mystical place.

The forest is centuries old and untouched in parts and one can get a good sense of what most of New Zealand must have been like in pre-European times. It is also an exceptionally picturesque and relatively easy walk with good accommodation throughout.

AS WE left after our 3½ days and commenced my 10-hour drive back home, I had cause for reflection.

I had read somewhere the name Urewera came from a legend that

□ **Marauti Hut**, on an arm of Lake Waikaremoana.

— PICTURE / William Pearce

an old Maori chief one night had rolled over in his sleep into a camp fire and had burned a certain delicate appendage.

Upon my return, I looked further into this and discovered Urewera does mean "burnt penis". Luckily for us, the only burnt appendage this time was my father's nose.

Each week we'll bring you a little piece of the world from A to Z, and this week it's...



ISRAEL



□ Israel's flag.

Local country name: Yisra'el.
Location: Middle East, bordering Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

Area: 20,800sq km (just one and a half times the size of Northland).

Population: 6,400,000.

Capital: Jerusalem (not recognised by UN; most countries have embassies in Tel Aviv).

Form of government: Parliamentary democracy.

Independence: 1948 from British mandate.

GDP/capita: \$35,000 (NZ's GDP/capita: \$33,000).

Life expectancy: 80 years (for NZers: 79 years).

Religions: Jewish (76%), Muslim (16%), Arab Christian (2%).

Official languages: Hebrew and Arabic.

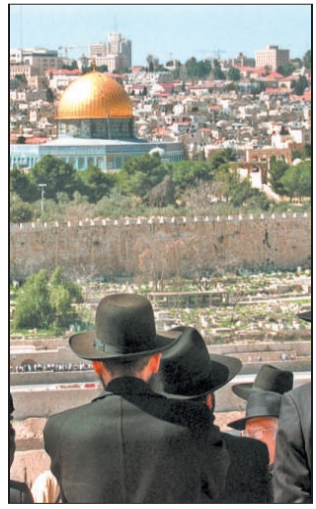
National food: Falafel (chickpea patties rolled up in pita bread).

Greeting: Shalom ("Peace" in Hebrew).

SURPRISING FACTS:

- Israel is not much bigger than Northland, but is the birthplace of two major world religions — Judaism and Christianity. It is also home to Islam's third holiest site and the holiest site of the Baha'i faith.
- Every Jew in the world has a right to Israeli citizenship.
- Israel has a highly developed economy, a life expectancy that surpasses New Zealand's, and is the only real democracy in the Middle East — but it is constantly overshadowed by conflict.
- The shore of the Dead Sea, 408 metres below sea level, is the lowest place on Earth.
- Followers of Judaism believe Israel was promised to them by God. It was home to Jewish kingdoms from about 1000BC, but by the time Jesus was born it was part of the Roman Empire. The Jewish population fell after a failed rebellion against the Romans in 132AD.
- After the genocide of Jews in World War Two, the United Nations divided British-controlled Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab. Arabs rejected the plan; Israel won the resulting war in 1948.
- Another war with its Arab neighbours in 1967 saw Israel vastly expand its territory. In six days Israel captured the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai has since been handed back to Egypt; Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005.
- The Hebrew language was extinct for about 2000 years before it was revived as the new official language in 1948.
- Israel is one of the few countries to have compulsory military service for women and men. Women serve 21 months; men 36.
- Israel spends more per capita on weapons than any other country (\$1900 per person per year). The US exports \$2 billion of military hardware to Israel each year. Only Saudi Arabia and Taiwan get more.
- Israel is one of nine countries thought to have nuclear weapons.
- Densely populated and with little fresh water, 100 percent of Israel's territory is under "severe water stress" — the highest in world.

— sources: The CIA World Factbook, Nationmaster.com, The Travel Book (Lonely Planet), Wikipedia.org



□ Ultra-Orthodox Jews pray overlooking the walled Old City and golden Dome of the Rock.



□ A Palestinian woman pushes a stroller past Israeli tanks at Gaza.

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