

Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape

12

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

12 Geotourism product interpretation: Rangitoto Island, Auckland, New Zealand

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Introduction

Rangitoto Island, an island of volcanic origin, is a unique geotourism attraction and landmark of Auckland, New Zealand, capturing the attention of tourists since 1890. The island's symmetrical cone and lava slopes rise gradually from the sea, making the shield volcano an iconic landmark for Auckland residents and a popular urban recreation area for domestic and international visitors. This chapter focuses on the effectiveness of different types of interpretive media (e.g. information signs and guided tours) as educative tools for geotourism which occurs in an urban context. It is based on a study which investigated which media were used most, how much visitors learned from them and whether visitors had a preference for a particular medium. While a number of publications address cultural and historical aspects of the island (Murdoch, 1991; Graham, 2005; Philips-Gibson, 2006; Kearns and Collins, 2006) and Rangitoto's natural history (Wilcox, 2007), no publications have investigated tourism on the island and there has been no visitor evaluation of the island and its interpretive media.

Study area

Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, is situated in the upper part of the North Island. With a population of about 1.3 million, the Auckland region accommodates 32.4 per cent of New Zealand's population (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). Although the region is quite densely populated, it offers numerous possibilities for tourism in natural environments. The research location – Rangitoto Island – lies in the Hauraki Gulf and is accessible by a ferry which can transport visitors from Auckland in about 10 minutes (Figure 12.1).

Rangitoto is a shield volcano – a landform characterised by broad, gently sloping sides formed by lava flows that spread in all directions from a central summit vent (Wilcox, 2007) – and is connected by a small land bridge to neighbouring Motutapu Island. It is by far the largest of the 50 cones and craters belonging to the Auckland volcanic field (Wilcox, 2007).

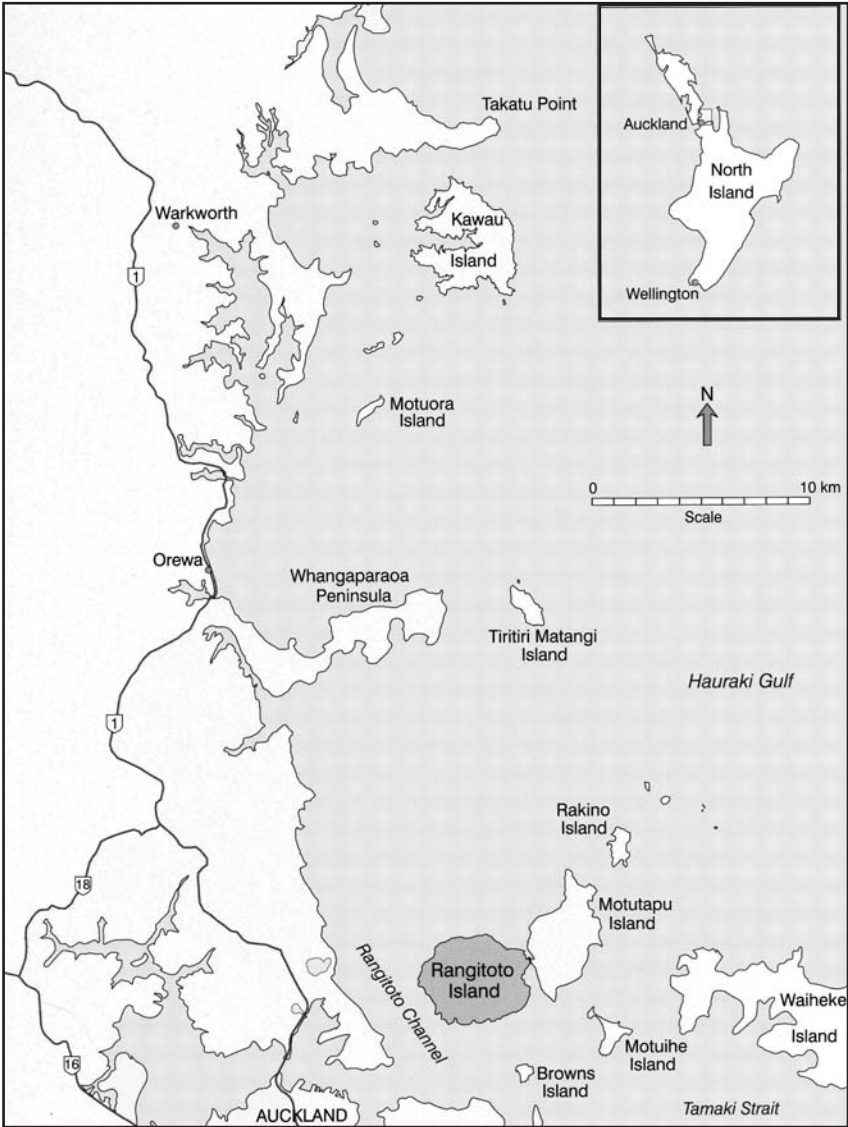


Figure 12.1: Location of Rangitoto Island (Source: Wilcox, 2007)

The Auckland volcanic field has been characterised as dormant and an eruption could therefore theoretically occur at any time. The Auckland volcanoes originate in a zone of melting about 100 km beneath the surface and have been classified as small and monogenetic volcanoes because every eruption springs from a separate batch of magma making its way to the surface (Jamieson, 2004; Wilcox, 2007). It is difficult to predict where and when an eruption in this field will take place. On the isthmus, where most of Auckland’s city and suburbs lie, 48 volcanoes have erupted within the past 150,000 years. Most eruptions date from only 10,000–50,000 years ago (Ell, 2004). Although the exact year of Rangitoto’s last eruption has not yet been identified, it is widely acknowledged that Rangitoto arose from the sea just 600 years ago, making Rangitoto the youngest volcano of the Auckland volcanic field (Ell, 2004; Wilcox, 2007).

Chapter extract

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