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Historic Richard Henry's house site

Richard Henry was the caretaker of New Zealand's first island wildlife sanctuary in the 19th century. Pigeon Island was home to Richard Henry, who was the international pioneer of the live transfer of birds to island refuges. This is a site of national significance, where New Zealand led the world in wildlife conservation, and is registered as a Category I Historic Place by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.

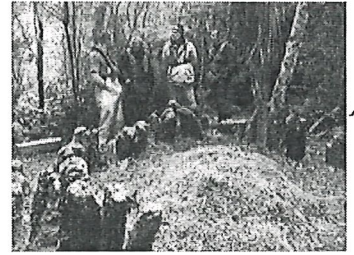
Introduction of predators

During the late nineteenth century a series of acclimatisation experiments resulted in the introduction of rabbits, followed by weasels, ferrets and stoats to New Zealand. The mustelids had an immediate impact on native bird populations, and it became obvious that strenuous efforts would be required to save the birds from extinction, especially our vulnerable flightless birds.

Island sanctuary

In 1891 Resolution Island was chosen as New Zealand's first sanctuary, and in 1894 Richard Henry was appointed caretaker and curator. Henry and his assistant Andrew Burt built a camp and boatshed in a sheltered bay on Pigeon Island. Henry later built a three roomed weatherboard cottage with a brick chimney and iron roof on the neck of the peninsula. All that remains of the house are a few piles and fireplace foundation.

During the first six years Henry transferred over seven hundred kakapo and kiwi from the mainland to Resolution and surrounding islands. His dog was muzzled so as not to harm the birds, and wore a bell so Henry could follow it when it was tracking a bird. Birds were held for short periods in a pen made of upright punga trunks with their bases buried. The remains of the pen still exist at the northern end of the clearing near the house site.



Bird pens at Richard Henry's house site

Within failure lie the seeds to success

On 4 August 1900 Richard Henry saw a weasel on Resolution. Although he remained on the island and started trapping and poisoning to eradicate the pests, his heart was not in it from that time on. He finally left Dusky Sound in 1908 and was appointed as a ranger on Kapiti Island.

Although the Resolution Island project was a failure, the many observations made by Richard Henry have helped the successes of modern bird conservation, particularly the kakapo recovery programme. In 2008 the Department of Conservation began a new eradication project to allow the reintroduction of endangered birds to Resolution Island.

Richard Henry describes bird collection

A letter from Richard Henry to the NZ government quoted from Hill, Richard Henry of Resolution Island pp.194-9:

"By the time we have all we need stowed in the Putangi she is laden to the gunwales. As well as food and camping gear there is also the sailing and birding gear.

...Our clothes are no use for this climate, only a load of wet and misery and the boots and socks are no better and the oilskin coat on top of the sweaty wool is a fit finish for a farce in clothing. ...we start up hill among the ferns, always up hill, for the steeper it is and the denser the undergrowth the better the kakapos [sic] like it. It is like all the time running through a hedge.

Sometimes a single kakapo will represent a hard day's work, and if half-a-dozen are secured, (with a kiwi and a roa), it is considered something of a feat. Once the birds are in portable knapsack cages we then have to deliver the birds to their new home in the best possible condition..."



Kakapo eating supplejack berries

Getting there

Pigeon Island is a tranquil and scenic location where native bird life can once again being enjoyed thanks to the pest eradication work undertaken by the Fiordland Lobster Company. Pigeon Island is located Dusky Sound. You can only reach this site by boat - either by visiting with a tourist operator or in your own sea transportation.

Further reading

Begg, A. C. & Begg, N. C. (1966) *Dusky Bay* (Whitcombe & Tombs).

Hall-Jones, J. (2002) *The Fjords of Fiordland* (Craig Printing).

Henry, R. (1903) *The habits of the flightless birds of New Zealand with notes on other New Zealand birds* (John Mackay, Government Printer).

Hill, S. & Hill, J. (1987) *Richard Henry of Resolution Island* (John McIndoe Press).

Peat, N. (2007) *New Zealand's Fiord Heritage: A Guide to the Historic Sites of Coastal Fiordland* (Department of Conservation Southland Conservancy).



The steep terrain of the Dusky Sound that Henry collected in

Related links

- [Nature conservation](#)
- [Lake Te Anau](#)
- [Richard Henry](#)
- ['Last, loneliest'](#) - an article from Heritage NZ magazine