

## A southern pohutukawa colony?

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Pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) is generally viewed as having its East Coast natural southern limit of distribution at Mawhai Point between Tokomaru Bay and Anaura Bay (Simpson, P.G. 2005). This is largely backed up by an article in the March 1960 issue of New Zealand Gardener, written by 'Rewa Glen' (a pseudonym of Marguerite Maude Johnson), the author of 'Botanical Explorers of New Zealand'.

This article, titled 'Kaiti Beach at Poverty Bay' finishes with:

"At Kaiti Beach, the third week in November, some of the pohutukawa near the shore were beginning to blossom; one shapely young tree was a blaze of crimson on the sunny side. These trees have been planted; *Metrosideros tomentosa* (sic) is not on Solander's list. The southern most natural habitat for this species on this coast is the bluff between Tolaga and the more northern Anaura Bay."

It is uncertain whether this statement refers to Mawhai Point, as mentioned by Simpson, or the nearby Marau Point, about 12 km further south. Whatever the uncertainty, Rewa Glen is quite clear that pohutukawa does not occur naturally in Gisborne, at least in modern times.

However, a letter to the Editor appeared in the N.Z. Gardener of May 1960, commenting on Rewa Glen's article of two months earlier. The writer remarks:

"In regard to pohutukawas, in the early days they extended down the coast as far as Kaiti Beach. Two ancient trees may still be seen growing out of one of the cliffs, but obscured from view from the beach by a bush-clad fold in the hill. I would estimate one of these trees as being 800 years old."

This letter was signed by 'T.R. Andrew (lately Superintendent, Parks and Reserves, Gisborne City Council)'. It seems likely that Mr Andrew would know what he was talking about!

Elizabeth and I attempted to find these trees during a visit to Gisborne a few years ago, but access difficulties intervened. Perhaps one of the Rotorua Botanical Society's more southern members might like to investigate?

## References

Andrew, T.R. 1960. Letter to the Editor. *In* N.Z. Gardener, March 1960.

Glen, Rewa. 1950. Botanical Explorers of New Zealand. A.H. & A.W. Reed.

Glen, Rewa. 1960. Kaiti Beach at Poverty Bay. *In* N.Z. Gardener, March 1960.

Simpson, P.G. 2005. Pohutukawa and Rata: New Zealand's Iron-hearted Trees. Te Papa Press, 2005.