

PARADISE AT PORTLAND

DAVID GRAHAM digs up some rocks from Whangarei's past that are being put to good use now and in the future.

If you dig deep enough you will find the detailed map of your own personal beginnings, contained in the words of old family letters, captured in the images of old photographs and encoded in your own unique DNA.

In Whangarei you don't have to dig very deep to find the beginnings of our own district.



New Zealand's human history began some 800 years ago, but the skeleton of the land we live in was formed over 30 million years ago. And it certainly looked a lot different to the way it looks now.

As the last Ice Age melted, flooding the Hatea, Mangapai and Otaika river valleys, the rising waters formed what is now Whangarei Harbour. The harbour was once a tropical lagoonal basin, surrounded by a hinterland cloaked in primeval forest. Once part of the ocean floor, layers of sediment and fragments of ancient mollusc shells have been captured within the stone. Some of the best examples of this stone can be found in a place aptly known as Paradise – at Portland, just ten minutes south of Whangarei.

Paradise Quarry is a boutique 10-acre quarry that produces Paradise Stone, a unique,



extremely beautiful high-grade limestone on 170 acres of stunning rolling pastoral land overlooking the harbour and Whangarei city. An area of the property was entrusted to the Queen Elizabeth 2 National Trust to preserve the outstanding examples of Paradise Stone in their naturally exposed and weathered form.

Around 25 years ago, the area now called Paradise was part of a larger farm running dry stock. As the number of enquiring stone enthusiasts grew, the quarry business was begun. It wasn't long before word of mouth – and the quality of the stone – had landscape designers and stonemasons from around the country wanting to purchase some.

Paradise Stone's real point of difference, and its stunning properties, become more obvious when the stone is not hidden below the surface of the earth, but when in the hands of an artisan. Releasing the stone, and uncovering its potential, is still carried out by hand, utilising the tools and methods that have been practised, and passed down, by generations of stonemasons.

The stonemasons at Paradise Quarry delight in the variety of rock they uncover – everything from a unique small piece of rock that will take its place in a stunning wall or pillar, to huge feature landscape boulders, large enough to become artistic landmarks in their own right. The quarry also produces paving stone, in both 'crazy' and 'cut' forms, natural steps, stepping stones, natural flagstones and sculptural rocks.

Because the colour and texture is unlike any other stone in the country, and unique to this area, Paradise Stone becomes not just part of a

landscape project but, more often than not, the focal point of the design.

Paradise Stone is now an integral part of prestigious landscape and building projects throughout the North Island. Recently a large shipment was sent to Rarotonga, where it now features as the crowning glory in the construction of an upmarket resort.

Its uses are as diverse as the patterns in the stone; it provides the face of the Whangarei courthouse, is the heart and soul of Chris Booth's 'Wave and Waka' sculpture, and the enigmatic 'Lottie' sculpture by Kap Potham.

Paradise Stone takes us back to a time when things were real and changes happened very, very slowly...30 million years is a long, long time!



IMAGES

- FAR LEFT: 'Lottie sculpture', Whangarei
- LEFT: Building at Matua Valley Wines
- TOP RIGHT: View from Portland quarry
- BOTTOM RIGHT: Walled garden, Mangawhai

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