

Appendix 3

Character statements for conservation areas

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1.0 Rangitoto Bach Communities Character Statement

Of the original 140 holiday baches built on Rangitoto Island during the Inter-War period, some 34 remain. They form an irreplaceable aspect of architectural and social history in New Zealand.

These bach communities – a notable example of an early twentieth century group of private holiday dwellings and boatsheds in New Zealand – occupy three broad coastal areas on the lower slopes of Rangitoto. The fragmented rock surface of the relatively recent lava fields has been increasingly colonised by a pohutukawa forest and other vegetation, resulting in a less stark environment than when most of baches were constructed.



When new private buildings on Rangitoto were disallowed in 1937, the Government ordered the removal of the existing baches within twenty years. The baches were later issued with a lifetime lease, and many baches were removed over the years under this policy to progressively return the island to a more natural state as each lease was surrendered or expired. In recent years, demolitions have ceased in recognition of the cultural heritage value of the bach communities, which were registered as historic areas by the NZ Historic Places Trust in 1997. The remaining baches are being conserved and restored, with one project receiving a UNESCO Award in 2008. Ongoing research into the bach communities is being conducted by the Rangitoto Island Historic Conservation Trust.

The baches are arranged in three separate communities:

- At Rangitoto Wharf, there is a settlement largely following the foreshore. While direct access is provided to most baches, and some at the western end of the settlement are located very close to the coastal path, others are located on rear sites and are now largely shielded from view. Some of the baches have been removed, but in most cases site modifications provide clues to the original settlement pattern. Eighteen baches remain in this settlement. An early coastal path has largely been obliterated by a later and wider path, but remnants of the historic path can be seen adjacent to this. To the seaward side of the coastal path are various boat ramps, some remaining boatsheds, and in some places a coastal wall in basalt. At the core of the settlement behind the wharf, various structures for community use or interest were built close to the wharf, including a salt-water tidal swimming pool – the best remaining structure of its type in the Auckland region – and a memorial arch. This separates the settlement into two almost linear residential components, one facing the harbour and the other, with a similar orientation, facing the cove behind the wharf.
- At Beacon End, where a navigation beacon is situated in the harbour, only three baches remain. Near one of the remaining baches, a network of paths and remnant structures indicates the location of another bach, but other baches have disappeared without trace, their sites now given over to regenerating forest. At one end of the settlement is a stone wall, possibly associated with a memorial long since lost.
- At Islington Bay, most of the settlement follows the coastline, but a few buildings are accessed from the inland road to Motutapu, which extends over the causeway from Islington Bay. This road passes close to the cove in which the Islington Bay wharf is located, and provides rear access to some of the coastal baches. It also provides access to the Rangitoto Hall and tennis courts, and one remaining bach. The Rangitoto Hall and its ancillary toilet block are both made of the local stone. The baches at Islington Bay used to extend to the point at the southern end of the bay beyond the quarry. The demolition of most of the baches at the south end of the Islington Bay has resulted in a



much smaller settlement, with a remaining bach on the point remaining as an isolated sentinel. The landform and disposition of buildings at Islington Bay has resulted in a more complex spatial quality to this settlement of thirteen remaining baches.

The baches reflect the building design preferences of their time, mostly in a rudimentary or stripped down form. Some are diminutive but almost archetypal examples of the 1920s/1930s bungalow style, while many are more akin to large sheds using traditional form and materials. In many instances recycled building elements from earlier buildings have been included, including materials gathered from the remains at Gardner's Gap, reflecting the economic hardship of the time and the kiwi 'do it yourself' approach.



The architectural individuality of the baches, displaying a rich variety of building techniques, contributes to their historical importance. A particular characteristic of the baches is the presence of outbuildings for ablutions, storage of boats and equipment, and even the generation of electricity. Some sites boast a smoke-house, out-door fish gutting bench, out-door eating area and shelters of various types, reflecting a largely out-door holiday lifestyle. The community facilities, constructed using prison labour, provide a regionally rare and notable group of structures constructed using mortared bluestone quarried on Rangitoto Island.

Some of the buildings and the landscape structures demonstrate a quirky approach that reflects the creativity of the owner/builders and their families. Stone borders include artistic touches such as polychromatic painting that are now fading or peeling. Other more durable crafted elements using ceramic shards and shells have survived in better condition on stone borders and freestanding situations. Sites that demonstrate some of the extremes of creative exuberance



include one bach in the Rangitoto Wharf settlement where the hard landscaping includes a number of artworks in mosaic, and another bach in the Islington Bay settlement that uses concrete pillars and walls to define a curtilage in the 'Garden Suburb' tradition.

Even though many baches have been demolished, in various instances there are enough remaining traces in the landscape, in the form of paths, clearings or even remnant structures, to demonstrate the original settlement pattern, especially when augmented with recent interpretative material. Other modifications, particularly in foreshore locations, attest to the holiday activities of generations of vacationers and residents in a tight-knit community. The interaction of the constructed elements and their natural context has created a unique cultural landscape that is rich in natural and cultural heritage values, well beyond the heritage significance of the baches individually or collectively.

