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Whangawehi Walkway opening the culmination of group's vision

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TEAM EFFORT: Whangawehi Walkway project coordinator Nicolas Caviale-Delzescaux (second from left) says, 'The profound thing is that landowners and local hapū have opened their doors to share the benefits of a restored environment with the wider community, with all New Zealanders.' He is with volunteers from the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group. Picture supplied

The restoration vision of a group of like-minded people culminates in the official opening of Te Aratia Walkway at Mahia tomorrow.

Work on the walkway, also known as Whangawehi Walkway, started in December 2020.

The project was led by the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group, a community initiative comprising marae, landowners and agencies with a focus on protecting the Whangawehi Stream.

Group project co-ordinator Nicolas Caviale-Delzescaux said the 12km project cost around \$800,000 and would allow people to access private lands and enjoy the benefit of restoration work done by the community.

"These spaces will help you reconnect with the environment and with our past when you go through the walkway's archaeological sites."

The first six kilometres of the walkway meander through farms, following the riparian planting alongside the Whangawehi River.

It comes to a whare built six years ago as a place for people to stop and hold wānanga.

Over time, volunteers have planted flax for weaving, creating a place that connects visitors and the environment.

The second half of the walk winds through commercial forestry of redwoods, pines and cypress before descending to Mahia Beach on the peninsula's west side.

Mr Caviale-Delzescaux described the overall restoration project as "amazing mahi".

"It has brought the birds back and the native fish have returned.

"It's a huge restoration programme. We retired over 150 hectares and planted over 250,000 trees. We received international awards for the work we have done but until we built the walkway, we could not share it with anybody."

Mr Caviale-Delzescaux said the walkway owed its vision to leadership from Tuahuru and Kaiuku marae.



Landowners followed that vision to restore the awa to pristine condition.

“The first planting took place in 2014. Ever since, we have been building our restoration programme. The walkway was the cherry on the pudding, as we say in French.”

With such leadership from the two marae and others, government agency Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa (Outdoors Access Commission) provided \$9600 for surveying and legal costs to secure walkway access to the land.

It also registered the walkway easement over the land, worked with the landowners, and provided advice and support to the project team and the council.

“The next step is bringing in new young people with exciting new ideas,” Mr Caviale-Delzescaux said.

“There is a lot more work yet to be done — tourism ventures, pest control and maintaining the walkway. These are all stepping stones.

“It’s been driven by modest people who understand that if you focus on the same vision you can work together, and that’s it.

“These two marae were wise enough to see the end goal — a restored awa and healthy water for fish again.”

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