

## Kaipara Coast: Art in the gardens

By Cate Foster

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**Cate Foster's weekend ramble takes her to a garden gallery that every member of the family will enjoy.**



Manicured paths lead through the Kaipara Sculpture Gardens, created on what was once farmland. Photo / Supplied

I'd been told in glowing terms about the Kaipara Coast Sculpture Gardens so I decided to combine a drive in the country on a sunny Sunday with a stroll through nature. That we could take in some art as well was the icing on the cake.

As we live on the North Shore, my friend and I took the Northern Motorway to Exit 396, where we turned off and headed for Kahikatea Flat Rd. If you live out west you could also reach this area via State Highway 16, up through Helensville.

Stopping only for a quick, pleasant and inexpensive lunch at DDs Country Cafe in Waitoke, we found the right turn-off on to SH16 (Kaipara Coast Highway) a few kilometres on and immediately felt we were in real country.

There were fewer expensively groomed hobby farms, more pine trees and flax bushes on the roadside. This was the real deal.

Almost immediately past the turn-off we came to Kaukapakapa village. Here, cellphones work yet the township still bears the air of its history, when kauri milling and the presence of the railway gave it gravitas.

Now the town is full of faded charm, seen in the sweetly nostalgic Kaukapakapa Memorial Hall, and the architecture of the hotel that looks as though it hasn't changed for decades.

The gently winding highway that leads us on to our destination of the Kaipara Coast Sculpture Gardens feels like a real country road.

We also feel like we are getting ever closer to Kaipara Harbour and, sure enough, pausing at the well-signposted gate to the Gardens, we see the vast expanse of water below us, just a couple of kilometres away as the crow flies.

The Gardens were everything we had been promised. Owner David Bayly grew up on the farm upon which the gardens now stand. Returning to his roots about 20 years ago, David decided to fashion a garden for the community, and also use it as a showpiece for his specialist nursery for plants that thrive in the Auckland region.

One thing led to another and, when art curator Sally Lush appeared on the scene, the Sculpture Trail was born.

Today, David's magnificent garden is nearing maturity, (although the redwood grove has a few hundred years to go), and the annual exhibition of 50–60 art works is an established local event.

Sculptors are invited to participate and, in doing so, get their work displayed for a year for a nominal fee. Every November a big party celebrates the changeover to the new exhibition; if you're a creative sort of person it's worth applying for a place now.

We wandered along the well-kept paths and marvelled at what we saw. There are orchards, vegetable and herb gardens, specialist gardens of flowers and ornamentals, water features and magnificent trees.

You can wander for an hour and a half through this magical place. Everywhere pieces of outdoor art, many of which would look at home at more famous venues, add to the natural beauty in which they are displayed. Several times I wished I had the sort of garden that could do one justice.

A bonus is how family-friendly the gardens are. There are huts for children to explore, instruments to play, hidey places to jump out from; they have as much fun as their parents, judging by the delighted shrieks we heard along the way.

David and his wife, Geraldine, have created something marvellous here. If you're heading north or west, or just Sunday driving, as we were, go there. It's worth discovering.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

**DDs Country Cafe:** 1097 Kahikatea Flat Rd, Waitoki. Ph 09 420 3009 .

**[The Kaipara Coast Plant Centre and Sculpture Gardens:](#)** 1481 Kaipara Coast Highway (SH16), Kaukapakapa. (About a 45-minute drive from Auckland's CBD). Ph 09 420 5655 . Open 7 days, 9am–5pm.

The 1km garden walk is along mainly gravel pathways, which unfortunately are not suitable for wheelchairs. No dogs except guide dogs.

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