

## Historic sites

# Mangarakau swamp – another NZNFRT treasure

History is coming full circle as today's owners (the NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust) set about restoring 160ha of Nelson's largest remaining freshwater wetland, now protected under a QEII covenant.

Given the 150-year history of gold mining, coal mining, logging and flax harvesting in the area, Mangarakau Swamp's survival is a miracle.

For starters, the 400ha swamp impeded access from as early as the 1860s, when gold and coal first brought miners into the remote area of north-west Nelson. Roads skirting the swamp were frequently boggy so, in 1907, the Collingwood County Council dug a

large central drain. The drain remains today but failed to defeat the swamp – as did subsequent attempts to drain and farm it.

The swamp's original vegetation – kahikatea / pukatea swamp forest and flaxland – were also valuable resources to early settlers. Flax harvesting began in the area in 1905 and a flaxmill operated at Mangarakau from 1911 until 1914 when many

workers left to join WWI.

A sawmill, established in 1909, also processed timber from the swamp and wider hinterland until 1920, and then again from 1932 to 1968. Vestiges of old wooden tram lines can still be seen along the old logging road beside the swamp, along with sawmill relics, and a huge chunk of a matai trunk which testifies to the grandeur of the former forest.



Photo: Tyree Studio Collection, 177661/3. Tasman Bays Heritage Trust/ Nelson Provincial Museum



Photo: Margaret McKee

Mangarakau Swamp: a nationally significant wetland and habitat for rare plant and animal species that has survived against the odds. The visitors' centre is centre photo.

Loading bales of dressed flax at the former mill for shipping from West Whanganui Inlet. The flax was dressed by scrubbing under running water to separate out the plant fibres used for making rope and cloth.

Today the houses, shops and post office of the once thriving Mangarakau settlement have gone, along with the extractive industries. Linking past with present, however, the Community Hall remains. Managed by Friends of Mangarakau Swamp on behalf of NZNFRT, it is now a visitors' centre and museum, housing historic photo and natural history displays.

A walkway enables visitors to explore the historic sites and see the next phase in Mangarakau's history - the restoration of its wetland ecology.