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**AUCKLAND
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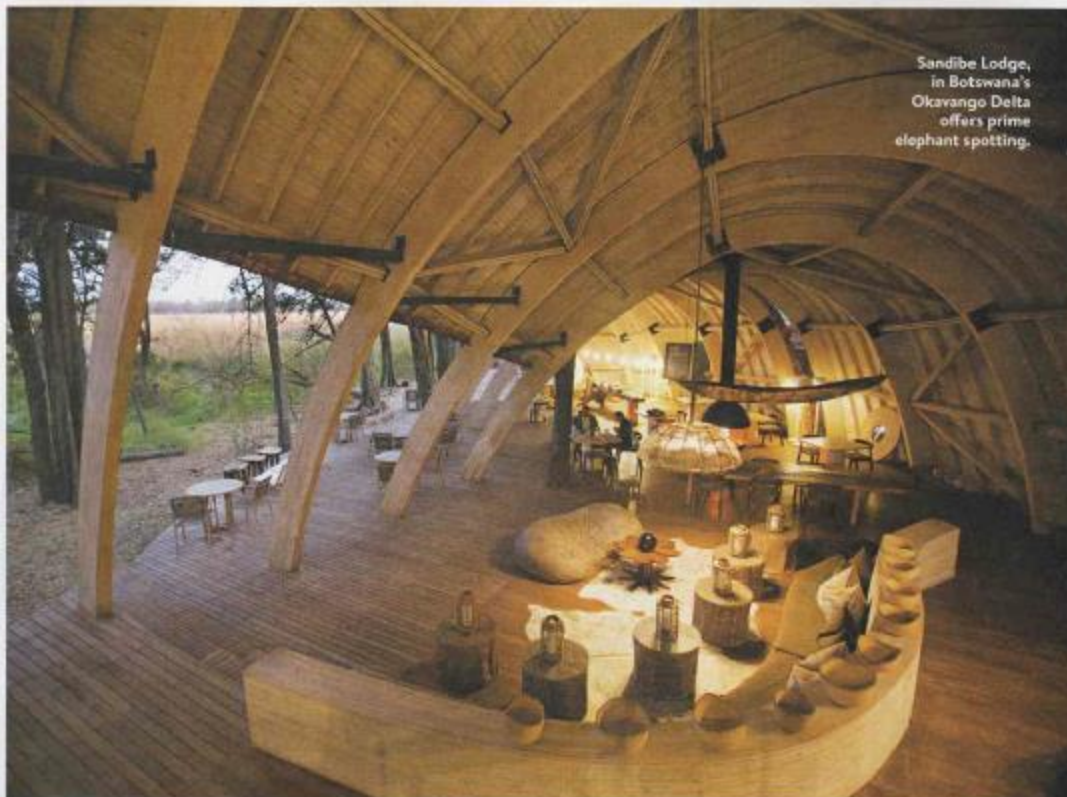


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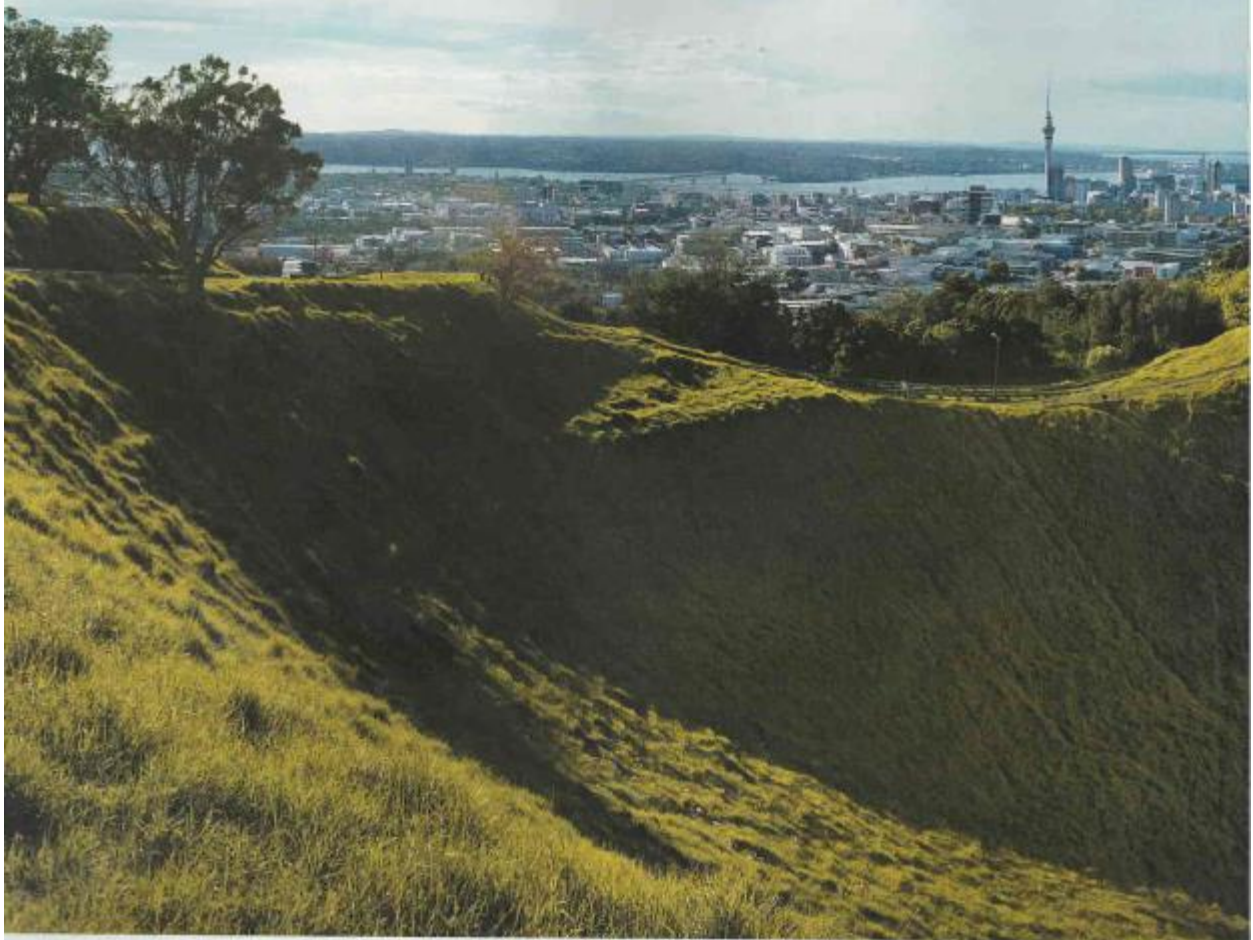
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MY CITY

THE WILDS OF AUCKLAND

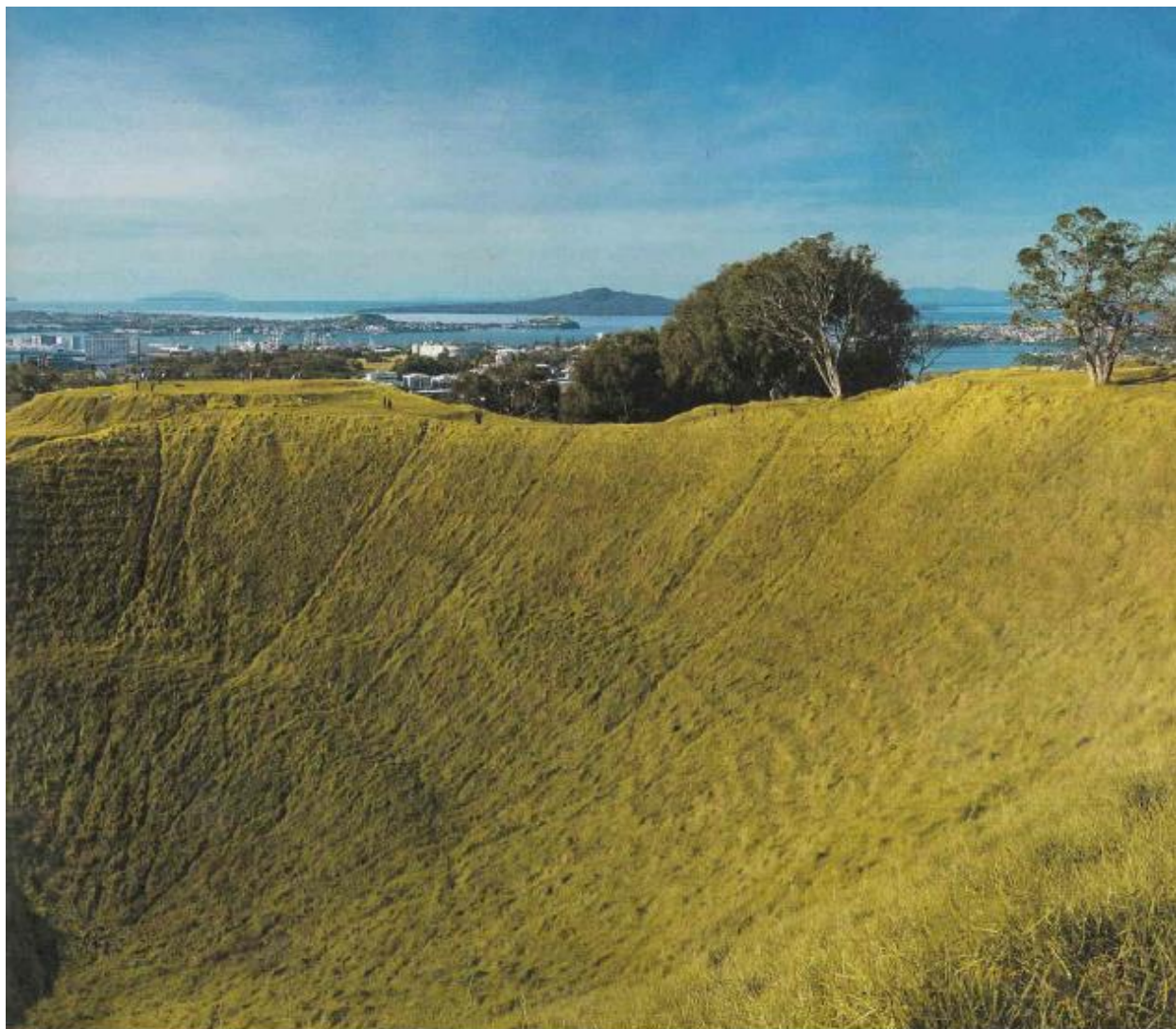
BY KENNEDY WARNE

It takes 12 minutes to walk across Auckland at its narrowest point. Let me elaborate. The North Island of New Zealand, of which Auckland is the largest city, looks like a fish with its head pointing south. At roughly the base of the fish's tail, two decent-size bites have been taken out of each flank, leaving two harbors. Central Auckland fills the isthmus in between.

Maori dragged their canoes across the isthmus here, on what is now known as Portage Road. At an intersection, a weathered plaque informs passersby that this half-mile connection "must be surely the shortest road between two seas anywhere in the world."

There's a volcano nearby, and I climb it. Auckland





is a city of volcanoes. Fifty of them lie within a 12-mile radius of downtown. They have been erupting for a quarter of a million years. The most recent—and the biggest—was Rangitoto, an island on Auckland's front doorstep. The volcanoes blew up, and then they went extinct. Not one of them has erupted twice, but the magma field beneath the city is still alive. Between a hundred and a thousand years from now, say the volcanologists, it will give fiery birth again.

Fourteen of the city's volcanic cones have been returned to Maori ownership. I'm not Maori, but it matters to me that the people of the land have been given back their ancestral peaks. Maori named and

knew all these volcanoes. They terraced them for gardens, built redoubts on them, fought bloody battles to defend them. When they recount the history of Auckland (which they know as Tamaki Makaurau—Tamaki of a hundred lovers), their words swoop like seabirds across the many summits as they name the cardinal points of their tribal geography.

I envy their connection to place. I have lived 54 of my 57 years in this city, but I seem to have occupied it without really inhabiting it.

Wendell Berry, the sage of Kentucky, says you can't know who you are until you know where you are. What seems important to me now is not just to be aware of

Auckland is a city of volcanoes, including Maungawhau/Mount Eden (above). It's also a city of water, overseen by Tangaroa, the Maori god of the sea (left).

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LUCY G. PHOTOGRAPHY (AUCKLAND)

my place but to be alive to it. So I stand on a cattle-cropped summit and pay my respects to a 30,000-year-old mountain.

This time of year—midwinter—sees the rising of the Pleiades in the night sky. To Maori it is Matariki, the pivot of each year. The old people often die at Matariki. They see it as a time for the changing of the guard. The old net is put away, they say, and the new net goes fishing.

I head west to the mountainous rim of the city, the Waitakere Ranges. Logged for its prime timber a century ago, this 15-mile stretch of rugged forest is now a heritage area, crisscrossed with trails, a green rampart between the city and the coast.

I cycle the ridge road through thin drifts of cloud, the forest's exhalations. It would be easy to get a crick in the neck on this road, self-evidently named Scenic Drive, where tree ferns lean into the roadway and forest birds soar overhead.

A short walking track takes me to a solitary kauri. If I had a totem tree, the kauri would be it. Kauris have trunks like

stone columns and crowns that spread like worshipping arms. In those crowns live multitudes. Perching plants build miniature forests in the forks of the branches. No one knows how many creatures live in these islands in the sky. I've climbed into these crowns and felt I was in a foreign country.

Beyond the western range lies an even wilder side to Auckland. Here the mountains fall sharply into the Tasman Sea. Powerful surf pounds this coast incessantly. Most of the beaches have black iron sand, which heats up in summer to almost untreacherable temperatures.

But it's winter, and on a windy Saturday afternoon at Te Henga, the surf is too big for swimming, the undertow too strong. I wade in as far as I dare. I grin wildly as the water sucks at my legs.

I'm drawn to these city fringes—the harbors, mountains, islands, and coasts—but I've also learned to look for the wild in the cracks of the tame. Jogging distance from my suburban home, there's a creek that runs in a deep valley between a commuter road

and a sprawling university campus. Few Aucklanders know it exists, but it's become the place I go to be stitched into the fabric of the world.

A century ago, Englishman Rudyard Kipling commemorated Auckland in a poem. It was the first poem I learned at school, and, even to a child, the first line struck a plangent chord: *Last, loneliest, loveliest, exquisite, apart.*

Auckland's a grown-up city now. Like any city its size, Auckland has money on its mind. As if 50 volcanoes weren't a sufficient visual signature, the city fathers decided 20 years ago to erect a 1,000-foot-high tower in the heart of the commercial district.

But down by the creek, or in the forest, or on a wind-lashed shore, Kipling's words still hold true. These are places of loneliness and loveliness, places apart. These are the places that hold me.

KENNEDY WARNE is an outdoorsman, writer, and founding editor of New Zealand Geographic magazine.

ART: TORRONS/ISTOCK/ALAMY; GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE



Low tide reveals a wide stretch of Piha Beach's black iron sands.