



The Early Climate-Adapted City above the Heretaunga Plains, East Coast New Zealand

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Lovely to have you on the show. This third in our series about early New Zealand climate-change refuge cities looks at the distinct architecture of the early quantum-technological period. It's over a hundred years old now, but very much admired. Our temperatures are still rising, Darwin today at 51C and our studio here 4km inland from where it used to be located.

Your family lived in this new city, Ōtātara-Patoka. Did they help design it?

I can't remember much about that, but Grandpa said it happened in the 2060s, just before the sea rose. He was on the Commissioner's committee as a sociologist. He'd previously visited Portugal and learned about city reconstruction after Lisbon's 1755 earthquake.

I mean, the ocean'd been rising a fair while by the 2060s. Most people on the coasts whined about sea-walls and wanted blocks to stop surges. Coastal house insurance was long gone. But the housing change was amazing—building a new city from scratch up-country—boom, just like that! I've been back once, but I live now in north-central Victoria. Grandpa always said Melbourne would go under, but Bendigo would be good as gold. Hot, yeah, but safe.

So what happened?

Well, they'd been doing earthquake and tsunami drills on New Zealand's east coast for years. They had a little shake 2041—4.4 Richter. The new Awatoto subdivision outside Napier



flooded. About 400 people drowned—more than died in the 1931 earthquake. I tell you, it put the bejesus up the local authorities—everybody. Damn right the mayor got sued!

So they decided to move off the Plains?

Nearly, not quite. That took the big shake of 2056. The 1931 Napier quake had lifted everything by 1.75m. The “overdue” 2056 shake did the opposite, sinking everything, the city wiped clean by the tsunami that followed. Most of Napier liquefacted, concrete buildings all sinking several metres. This time the death toll from the tsunami was over 6,000. A national emergency was called.

No looking back this time. Government established a new city entity Ōtātara-Patoka. Arguments for including Taradale or Hawke’s Bay in the name were kicked sideways by the Government and national Māori leadership. It was an era of decolonising city names.

All new housing?

Ironically, this brought real equity to housing since neither Māori nor Pākehā could live on the Plains any more—reverted again to wetlands and lagoons. The new city gave everyone modern, networked buildings, apartments, no electricity costs, warm housing, all municipally maintained. You should see the cafes and nightlife!

The new rail-line legislated to run frequently north-south frequently for passengers and freight had to compete with the hourly hover-drone services to Auckland and Wellington. When I visited Ōtātara-Patoka there were cute tiny native bats that would flit across the city. And the tuis, bellbirds and piwaka fantails in the predator-free city were wonderful. Cats and dogs had to be belled and inside at night.

The city went up fast?

Yes, amazing. Everything was pre-planned and prefabricated. They had an enlightened Commissioner who saw the project through. No building

over 4 stories, all bottom-levels had to be shops, businesses or cafés. Houses, apartment clusters, all laminated wood. Only electric cars and bikes, rented or hailed. Every house had small wind turbines and solar-power storage.

Every street and building was tree-lined or covered. Enough surplus electricity to feed the local paper mill and the port. Main streets were built with lower-level pedestrian air-conditioned walkways—like Toronto, but against heat not cold.

The upper part of the Plains south of Hastings still grew fruit, vegetables and vineyards after the quake until the late 2070s. But then the great northern hemisphere ice melt raised the sea level in about ten years, right across the Plains, by a further ten metres.

So you had a perimeter city around the old Heretaunga Plains: Havelock North, suburbs at Pakipaki, Fernhill and above Taradale. The original Ōtātara Pah became iconic waterfront property! Mataruahou, Napier's Bluff Hill, became an island again, exotic and secret.

Some regattas are held on the lagoons across the Heretaunga Plains. But it's risky because old buildings stick up in the shallow waters.

Architecturally...?

It was the explosion of Māori-Pākehā art that “made” the city, a wonderful irruption that surprised many. But this quickly became “our” success story locally and nationally. It lightened up the constitutional changes being made under the Treaty of Waitangi. Bridges, public buildings, street signage, names and city parks—quite fantastic, a beautiful blend.

Pania of the Reef was relocated from Napier's Marine Parade before inundation. She's now located in front of the new city building. Saying “new” is like Oxford referring to its New College that's actually hundreds of years old, isn't it?

What about earning a living?

Some of the population dispersed to Central Hawkes Bay, but the new Native Forests Act of 2039 generated a series of new Ōtātara-Patoka businesses creating many skilled job opportunities, and added incredible value to timber exports that came to rival Scandinavian pine internationally. And once the forests got going, did they draw down carbon, or what!

A lot of the kiwifruit orchards and vineyards re-established above Ōtātara-Patoka, nearer the Kaweka Ranges, replacing sheep and beef farming. Fig-growing for export became huge, too. It's a no-pesticide crop. The self-sufficiency mania gradually eased but it was great to see locally grown produce markets.

So, inadvertently, the earthquakes and sea-level rise renewed indigenous carving and design, built a set of renewable, low-carbon businesses, and made a fabulously comfortable city in a climate as hot as Cairns. The new beaches aren't bad—not sandy, but good for fishing and swimming.

Sounds enlightened. Damn those kiwis. At least we're beating them in cricket and netball regularly.

Not enlightened, sorry. People took more than a hint in the life-threats from the repeated quakes-tsunamis. Same blunt reality that changed NSW farmers' minds about climate change after the five floods and two bushfires in one year in 2030 that ate Sydney's backend.

