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ART AND PRODUCTION

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GENERAL MANAGER

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ADVERTISING SALES

Kerry McKenzie, Hawkhurst Media
Ph 0-9-523 1754, Fax 0-9-523 1875

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER

Lisa Ludvigson
P. O. Box 8900, Symonds St, Auckland
Ph 0-9-623 1043, Fax 0-9-623 1033

MAIN CONTRIBUTORS

Erick Brenstrum, Andrew Goodfellow, Derek Grzelewski,
Martin Hill, Gerard Hindmarsh, Warren Judd, Ashley
Smith, John Walsby, Richard Wolfe, Richard Worrall,
Vaughan Yarwood

PATRON

Sir Edmund Hillary

SCANNING AND FILMWORK

RPM

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Ph 0-9-623 1043, Fax 0-9-623 1033.

E-mail address: subs@nzgeographic.co.nz

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LETTERS

The Chathams' millennium?

Andrew Goodfellow's learned treatise on the first sunrise of the millennium (I know that the next one does not start until after the end of the 1000th year, just as the year does not end until after the end of the 12th month, but everyone else is going to celebrate Jan 1, 2000, so who am I to buck the trend?) has generated a mixture of feelings here.

With all the fierce, protective love of a mother for a less-than-brilliant child, we take exception to such mainland propaganda as "uttermost end of the earth" and "deplorable meteorological statistics" when applied to our islands. I must add here that I am writing this in warm, sunny weather, while Queenstown is flooded and the Rangitata River is demolishing significant portions of the Main Trunk Line. It comes as no surprise to us that one of our few points of regional pride, our "first to see the sun" title has been stolen by the stroke of a legislative pen in a Pacific micro-state, even if the move is of dubious international acceptance.

As a seaman and navigator, I carried out a few calculations of my own, with an old *Nautical Almanac*, a South West Pacific Chart and a *National Geographic* map. These rather limited facilities gave me some approximate answers that not only verified the Caroline Island claim, but made the disparity worse. I have them beating us on Chatham Island by some 25 minutes, rather than Mr G's 16. Nearby Pitt Island will see the sun two minutes earlier. If Department of Conservation approve, sunrise viewers could gain a further one-minute advantage by landing on Round Island in the middle of the Star Keys Reef, or another three minutes beyond that by landing on the more southerly Antipodes Island.

In describing the change from Julian to Gregorian Calendars, Mr G omits the amount of the change involved in the belated British adoption of Pope Gregory's reforms. Finally overcoming religious prejudice that had opposed a perfectly sensible scientific reform, the British Parliament deleted 11 days from their calendar in 1752, to the accompaniment of riots by those convinced that it was some wicked Popish plot to rob honest Protestants of eleven days of their lives.

Mr G's final points are well taken. But if you wish to see the first sunrise from a place that is readily accessible and populated by friendly, laid-back people, you cannot go beyond the Chatham Islands. Club Med it is not. It is a place where stopping on the road, even to take a photograph, will cause locals to slow up and cast a solicitous eye over you to make sure that you do not need help. See you in the new millennium!

*R L Clough
Waitangi, Chatham Islands*

Pohutukawa

We enjoyed reading the splendidly illustrated article on pohutukawa in Issue 28. However, we wish to offer different opinions on pohutukawa ecology to some of those presented in the story.

1. We find it difficult to accept the anecdotal suggestions that lack of adequate nutrition and shortage of rainfall in Northland are factors in pohutukawa's decline. Pohutukawa is very tolerant of poor conditions. For example, it colonises bare lava and is the most successful of the eight plant species found on volcanic White Island.

2. The natural southern limit on the west coast of the North Island is Pukearuhe in northern Taranaki.

3. It is probable that there are trees over 200 years old on Rangitoto Island. We do not believe that pohutukawa forest will be superseded on Rangitoto at the rate you suggest. Pohutukawa's lifespan is probably in excess of 500 years, and some of the lava flows providing the harshest sites are still in the process of being colonised by pohutukawa. As yet any likely successors, (e.g. tawa or mangao) are rare or absent from the island.

We expect that there will be many centuries of pohutukawa-dominant forest on Rangitoto Island yet.

*Bruce Clarkson and Bruce Burns
Landcare Research, Hamilton*

New Zealand Geographic welcomes readers' letters. Correspondence can be posted to P. O. Box 8900, Symonds St, Auckland, faxed to 64 9 623 1033 or e-mailed to letters@nzgeographic.co.nz