Geoheritage: A New Zealand rock for the Australian National Rock Garden

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# ABSTRACT

The aim of the National Rock Garden (NRG), in Canberra, is to celebrate the geological heritage of Australia through a display of large, iconic rocks from across the continent. Why, then would we want to include a New Zealand rock?

As it happens, the eastern margin of the Australian continental plate is defined by the Alpine Fault in the South Island and a subduction Zone east of and beneath the North Island. Thus, the west coast of the South Island and all of the North Island are part of the Australian plate, and have been since cessation of sea floor spreading in the Tasman Sea some 50 million years ago.

In this talk, I make the case for an andesite boulder from Mt Taranaki (Taranaki Maunga, also known as Mt Egmont), to represent New Zealand in the NRG. Some points to consider:

1. Two large boulders from Mt Taranaki are displayed outside the National Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarewa), in Wellington, which is a sister city to Canberra.
2. Mt Taranaki (2518 m), a dormant andesite stratovolcano in the western North Island, is an outstanding natural feature of both scientific and cultural significance.
3. Large andesite boulders are readily obtainable from existing quarries, which exploit lahar deposits on the lower slopes of the mountain. The geomorphology of these deposits is interesting in itself.
4. My wife, Sue Pillans, is a direct descendent of Kotiro Hinerangi, of the Ngaruahine iwi, in south Taranaki. Kotiro, was captured by a Ngapuhi raiding party and taken to Northland, where she became a slave of the young Waimate chief, Hone Heke. She was eventually gifted, by Heke, to Scottish gunsmith, Alexander Gray, whom she married in Kororareka (Russell). In 1844, she grievously insulted Heke, who took revenge by sacking the town and famously cutting down the British flagstaff. [Sue is descended from Kotiro and Alexander’s eldest daughter, Margaret, born in 1830]

Rocks displayed in the National Rock Garden should tell interesting, multi-faceted stories. As described above, a large boulder from Ngaruahine lands on the southeastern slopes of Taranaki Maunga would be very appropriate.