

## **SUPER STARRY NATURAL NIGHT SKIES**

### ***WHAT WE HAVE IN WAIHEKE***

Waiheke has many wonderful attractions, great beaches, forests, a regional park, birdlife, vistas, vineyards.

There is however one amazing feature that most people don't see, because they don't realise it's there. Something our ancestors saw and something we can easily see, exactly as they saw it in their time.

We are of course talking about our glorious night skies.

Just look up on a clear moonless night and there, draped across the sky, is our galaxy, the Milky Way, our home in the universe.

There's the Southern Cross, that the navigators of old used as a compass, a clock and a calendar on their journeys across the Pacific.

There's our closest neighbour beyond our solar system - Alpha Centauri – the first star we come to, 41 trillion kilometres away – whose light we see today, left there 4.37 years ago.

There are the two fuzzy Magellanic Clouds, that the explorer Ferdinand Magellan saw one night, then the next night, then the night after that... and realised... they couldn't be clouds... so what were they?

Today we know they are dwarf galaxies beyond the Milky Way, the larger being 160,000 light years away, the smaller 200,000 light years away, and light travels at 300,000 kilometres per second, so you do the maths!

### ***WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE NIGHT SKY***

Now here's the thing, mankind thinks of daylight as the norm and when it gets dark, we go indoors and switch on our lights, both inside and out, to try to recreate that norm.

The fact is, in the daytime the Sun is like a torch shining in our collective faces.

The comforting blue sky we see is an illusion.

Only at night do we come face to face with the truth... we live on a small insignificant sphere, forever orbiting a minor star called the Sun, with a moon for close company together with a few planetary fellow travellers on the ecliptic and remote astral neighbours in their countless billions, on an arm of one of a 100 billion galaxies scattered throughout the vast inky blackness of space.

So, it's as well we get to know our place in the great scheme of things rather better... don't you think?

### ***WHY IT'S IN DANGER AND WHAT WE ARE DOING ABOUT IT***

When most people in New Zealand look up at night, they can't see many of its marvels.

And this holds true for the vast majority of people in our world.

On Waiheke Island, we can see many if not most of them.

But for how long?

That which has already degraded views of the night sky for most people on our planet, creeping light pollution, the result of an ever-growing population who don't realise the impact of poorly managed outdoor lighting, has already started to impact us on the island.

Harnessing the support of the Waiheke Local Board, Auckland Transport, organisations and business throughout the length and breadth of our island, the Auckland Astronomical Society, the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand, and last but certainly not least the caring citizens of Waiheke Island, a concerned group called 'Dark Sky Waiheke Island', are confident that by reaching out to share their knowledge and love of astronomy and explaining what each of us can do to diminish light pollution, the natural wonder of our island's night skies will be preserved for us, for our children and for generations into the future, to enjoy.

So, remember, next time you are outside on a cloudless night on Waiheke Island, look up and get ready to see... super starry vistas, and to be amazed!