

# Kauri gum

Amber stone polishing guide



**Kauri history  
facts and science**

**Use your G'moncense  
Discover the secret past of Aotearoa**

Over the past million years, massive tsunamis have crashed against New Zealand's coasts, sweeping from east to west sinking Northland's kauri forests.



These giant trees were so huge, they sunk in upright positions in the softened soil. The smaller trees were violently flattened. These tsunami waves could strike every few hundred to a few thousand years.

## The Rise and Fall of Kauri Trees

Early settlers nearly wiped out New Zealand's kauri forests. The strong, straight wood was perfect for making ship masts and was even used to help rebuild London after the Great Fire.



Maori had long used kauri gum as a fire starter which also doubled as incense, tattoo ink, and chewing gum. It became highly sought after, eventually finding its way into everything from wigs to varnish.

Once most of the forests were cleared, gum diggers turned to Northland's sunken, buried Kauri trees, excavating their ancient resin.

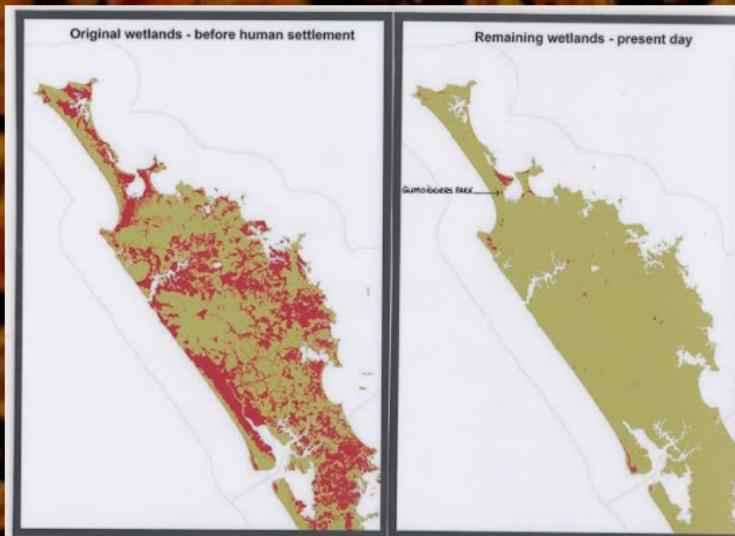
Thousands of families worked in the gumfields, digging up and polishing kauri gum to sell.



Mountains of gum were shipped overseas, until the swamps ran dry, and synthetic varnishes became more common in the global market.

Between 1850 and 1950, 450,000 tons of gum were exported. The peak in the gum market was 1899, with 11,116 tons exported that year, with a value of £600,000.

In 2025, this would be the equivalent to \$220 million NZD.



Since the early 1900's, Kauri gum has been largely forgotten. However, it still occasionally washes up along Northland's coastal towns, waiting to be discovered. These are the places to search for swamp Kauri gum, listen for the crunch beneath your feet and dig.

# How to Polish Kauri Gum

## 1. Preparation:

Fill a bowl with water and add a drop of dish soap.

## 2. Scrape (optional) and Shape:

Remove the hard outer layer of crust (gum oxide) using a blade, scissors, or a sharp knife (Be careful to scrape away from you)  
Shape it rounded or give it flat areas to create clear “windows”



## 3. Smoothing:

Dip the gum in water frequently while sanding to refine it's shape.

Go through the sandpaper in orders 1-9, a dot represents 1 and a line is 5.



#### 4. Detailing:

The first two sandpapers are the most important for getting out any scratches flaws or other imperfections like oxidation.



#### 5. Dry it:

Make sure you dry the water off the gum to prevent oxidization.

And stand the sanding pads upright to dry.

#### 6. Do some science:

Make sure you take a good look inside your gum. You might find trapped bugs, ferns, or other rare inclusions, making your piece even more special.



Fun fact:

Did you know, that the harder a piece of Kauri Gum (or Amber) gets, the more time has passed since it was formed? In fact, for every 10% increase in hardness, approximately 100-200 years have gone by! This is because the gum slowly polymerizes over time, becoming more and more rigid as it gets older

Nice work polishing that gum.  
Not many people in Aotearoa have smelled this stuff yet,  
so you're ahead of the game.  
What you've smelt there is G'moncense, a by-product  
from our Kauri gum jewellery

Its up to us to do the science, post your scientific  
discoveries to #gmon and dont forget to @gumlamps



Gum Guides



The Story of Kauri