At the Edge of the “Land of the Long White Cloud”

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There we were. We had finally made it. Six hours of traveling due north, passing through dozens of quaint, small towns that dotted the vast green countryside had led us to our final destination. Not only is Cape Reinga the northernmost point of New Zealand, but it is also where the deep blue waters of the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean meet.

My final trip during my semester abroad in New Zealand began on an early November morning. We left the urban streets of bustling Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city, in search of a more peaceful and natural landscape. My friends and I grabbed our hiking shoes and cameras and set off to what was soon to be one of my favorite places in the world. As the Auckland skyline grew smaller and smaller behind us, we looked ahead to the winding roads and rolling green hills of the North Island countryside. After a quick lunch break and a couple of more hours in the car our destination was in sight.

As soon as I stepped out of the car, I was immediately blown away by the breathtaking views and the strong, salty winds. A long brick pathway led us down the side of a hill to a lookout where there stood a large, white lighthouse and arrows pointing in the direction of the world’s most famous cities. Giant sand dunes to the left and cliffs and sandy beaches to the right framed the spectacular view that lay straight ahead. Prominent white caps marked the area where the two waters met and were illuminated by the sun, which peeked through the clouds above.

More than just one of the country’s many beautiful destinations; Cape Reinga has meaning to the Maori, the native people of New Zealand. To the Maori, the joining of the waters is representative of the male sea meeting the female sea. The waves that form as a result of this marriage symbolize the creation of life.

As we sat on top of the hill, looking out to the miles and miles of ocean that lay in front of us, I had time to reflect on the past few months that I had spent traveling and studying in New Zealand. Cape Reinga was just one of many trips that I took during my time abroad. All of these experiences not only deepened my love of science but also expanded it. As a biology major hoping to attend a graduate school to be a physician’s assistant, my main focus throughout college and even high school has been on the medical side of biology. However, after being exposed to the rich and unique flora of New Zealand, I developed a greater interest in ecology and environmental science. Furthering my interest was the way that the Maori incorporated nature into their culture and the importance that they placed on it. I am so thankful for this experience, which opened my eyes to a branch of biology that I previously never paid much attention to before.