

SECTION 3 Questions 28–40

Read the text on pages 112 and 113 and answer Questions 28–40.

KAURI GUM – a piece of New Zealand's history

A

The kauri tree is a massive forest tree native to New Zealand. Kauri once formed vast forests over much of the north of the country. Whereas now it is the wood of the kauri which is an important natural resource, in the past it was the tree's sap (the thick liquid which flows inside a tree) which, when hardened into gum, played an important role in New Zealand's early history.

After running from rips or tears in the bark of trees, the sap hardens to form the lumps of gum which eventually fall to the ground and are buried under layers of forest litter. The bark often splits where branches fork from the trunk, and gum accumulates there also.

The early European settlers in New Zealand collected and sold the gum. Gum fresh from the tree was soft and of low value but most of the gum which was harvested had been buried for thousands of years. This gum came in a bewildering variety of colours, degree of transparency and hardness, depending on the length and location of burial, as well as the health of the original tree and the area of the bleeding. Highest quality gum was hard and bright and was usually found at shallow depth on the hills. Lowest quality gum was soft, black or chalky and sugary and was usually found buried in swamps, where it had been in contact with water for a long time. Long periods in the sun or bush fires could transform dull, cloudy lumps into higher quality transparent gum.

B

Virtually all kauri gum was found in the regions of New Zealand where kauri forests grow today – from the middle of the North Island northwards. In Maori and early European times up until 1850, most gum collected was simply picked up from the ground, but, after that, the majority was recovered by digging.

C

The original inhabitants of New Zealand, the Maori, had experimented with kauri gum well before Europeans arrived at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They called it *kapia*, and found it of considerable use.

Fresh gum from trees was prized for its chewing quality, as was buried gum when softened in water and mixed with the juice of a local plant. A piece of gum was often passed around from mouth to mouth when people gathered together until it was all gone, or when they tired of chewing, it was laid aside for future use.

Kauri gum burns readily and was used by Maori people to light fires. Sometimes it was bound in grass, ignited and used as a torch by night fishermen to attract fish.

