

TUIE RIMUTAKA FOREST PARK TRUST RAG

RIMUTAKA FOREST PARK TRUST INCORPORATED
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December 2002

Welcome to the 3rd edition of the RAG!

Its been a busy year out in the Park. Thanks to all the Trust members and DOC staff who have taken part enthusiastically and with such good humour on projects ranging from **education kits, pine pulling, track development, firewood days, planting days, pest control** and other new and exciting proposals on the way.

Looking forward to catching up with you all at the Trust Christmas barbecue Sunday 15 December at 4pm.

BIRDS, birds birds!

If you have been around the Catchpool Valley over the last few months you may have had the pleasure of seeing numerous Tui feeding from the Kowhai trees around the Visitor Centre and perhaps even noticed some, who have over-indulged, falling drunken from tree branches. As well, increased numbers of bellbirds, grey warblers, kingfishers, tits have been seen in the valley.

Native forest areas are also enjoying a growth spurt with healthy undergrowth, including new Kahikatea and Rewarewa seedlings, helped by damp spring conditions and pest control work undertaken by the Trust.

Bill Milne, Rimutaka Forest Park Trust

Tui Inspire Catchpool Valley Planters

Tui provided musical accompaniment for the 30 keen locals and Rimutaka Forest Park members who rallied to a call from the Department of Conservation to help plant native seedlings in selected of logged-over areas in the Catchpool Valley on Saturday, 7 September.

During a "fast, furious and fun" 1.5 hours of digging and planting, participants ranging in

age from 29 to 87 planted around 200 trees - including mahoe, ti kouka (cabbage trees) and toe toe - in an area where pines were removed last year.

DOC Poneke area community relations officer Annabel Riley said it was "fantastic" to see so many people turn up to contribute to the return of native bush to the valley, and enjoy themselves in the process.

"It is a great form of Saturday morning exercise" said one participant.

"The enthusiasm of the participants there showed that people love to be involved in improving their park. The park is a great community asset" said Russ McStay, Secretary of the Rimutaka Forest Park Trust.

Annabel Riley, Community Relations, Poneke Area



Vera Johnstone and Elaine Price – armed and dangerous

Matamata Conservation Corp - Orongorongo Track gets a Facelift

The Orongorongo track surface (between the carpark and Orongorongo River) has been in need of some improvement and it was a great surprise, when we received an offer from the Matamata Education and Environmental Trust to carry out some work on this track!

Arrangements were made with John Rush and DoC to provide tools and accommodation and on Thursday 8th October 2002, ten 16 to 18 year olds, under the capable direction of Annaleah Bodle (nee Rush) reported for "instruction".

Our objective was to deal with the numerous boggy sections caused by accumulations of silt and leaves which had scoured out dips and hollows in the track. We also needed to increase the number of diagonal cut-off drains to reduce the likelihood of future scouring by stormwater. My job was to show them what to do.

Once they got the idea, they worked with a will and determination to fix the problem – and fix it they did! The bogs miraculously disappeared with new drains to lead water from the dips and from the steeper sections. I was hard put to keep ahead of them – supposedly setting the location and pace, etc of work, but as they got the idea they soon leapt ahead of me making their own judgements and delighting in their progress under Annaleah's firm but understanding leadership.



Matamata Conservation Corp members

Stops for tea breaks and lunch were surprisingly brief, whilst allowing limited scope for some youthful exuberance before getting back onto the job. With such energetic and sustained attention it was little wonder that nearly all the track through to the river had been done. By 4.30 pm I was quite ready to go home – but not these youngsters – they took off again with John Rush to do a round of the possum traps before their evening meal!

Having amply demonstrated their ability to undertake such work there was no need for me to accompany them the next day when they tackled start of the Mount Matthews track!!

What a pleasant surprise to find such keenness and enthusiasm, especially in this age group and I have no doubt that this is largely due to Annaleah's influence. In consequence, my confidence in this up and coming generation has been given a huge boost! I hope we will see more of this group in future. Thanks to John Rush for arranging it all.

John Hunt, Rimutaka Forest Park Trust

DOC happenings!

- Flumings installed on culverts to stop erosion of soft material from logging road edges.
- Water quality samples taken from Catchpool and Graces upstream have found only a slight increase of sediments after heavy rain.
- The lower campground closed when some buffer trees blew over after logging.
- Replacement of grass areas with native grasses and cabbage trees in the top carpark by Trust members and staff.
- Wilding pine seedlings and other weeds have been removed by DoC staff and Telecom EDS unit.

Offences

Car break-ins still occur occasionally, obviously by the same person or persons each time. A driver seen doing wheelies on the grass lawns, found the park gate had been locked and the police called. He was a learner driver with a passenger. Also the car was found to have a number of faults – the result was an instant fine of \$800.

Accommodation

The House nearest to the park gates has had new flooring fitted in the laundry and a new shower installed. Repainting has done away with the previous ghastly pink decor in the kitchen, laundry, toilet and bathroom.

The smaller of the two temporary huts has had extra windows fitted and the whole building repainted inside and out.

The larger accommodation is soon to have a new roof fitted (the old one leaked like a sieve).

Staff

A new staff member has been appointed and will join us next month on a one year contract.

David Lewis, Ranger Catchpool Field Centre

Wild Day Out!

28 volunteers from EDS (Telecom) hit the Catchpool slopes in October. Approximately 20 000 pine seedlings were pulled from the logged-over slopes. The conditions were glorious with soft damp soil, sunshine and a gentle breeze - breaking into a howling northerly by late afternoon.

The pine seedling removal is part of the restoration of the valley, in Rimutaka Forest Park, from a pine production forest to a naturally regenerating native forest.

The corporate volunteers spent four hours pulling seedlings, along with hearing a briefing of the logging project, eating loads of sausies and having a guided tour around Tawa Grove in Catchpool Valley with John Rush from Rimutaka Forest Park Trust. "This was the first time we have worked with a corporate group," says Poneke area office community relations officer Annabel Riley. "We removed a large number of seedlings and gave another sector of the community an opportunity to take part in some hands on conservation activities, many of whom have rarely been on a hillside and have little knowledge of conservation issues."

A comment from one of the participants: "Bugged last night and limbs were sore this morning! Over all it was an excellent experience and an eye opener; loved the views from the top. Felt sore but really, really good about giving some time back to the community"

Annabel Riley, Community Relations, Poneke Area



Rachel Abraham from EDS tackles the slopes

Positive feedback

Here are some comments from happy hut users after a stay in Orongorongo Valley

In particular we noted:

- wonderfully comfortable new mattresses at Haurangi Hut;
- clearance of vegetation around the hut which has increased the amount of light inside and prevented possum access to the roof;
- improvements to the track including clearer signage (especially to Haurangi Hut and an excellent new section on the Big Bend track at Big Bend (replacing the steep and dangerous steps).

Extracts from a recent letter to John Rush

Road maintainance

A joint project was held between the Orongorongo Club and DoC to undertake maintenance and repair work on the 4WD road into the Orongorongo Valley in mid November.

The road was originally constructed for the DSIR, Ecology division (now Landcare) in 1968 for access to their research station located at Green's Stream. Starting at the River mouth it runs 11 Km along the true left bank of the Orongorongo river till it reaches its destination at the research station. Passing for some distance across the privately owned Orongorongo Station, the road is not available for public vehicle access.

The 4WD road is however kept maintained for the use of Landcare for access to their research station, for servicing of hut's and facilities in the valley, general DoC work and also for emergency services such as Police Search and Rescue, Fire services and similar.

The maintenance weekend is held annually and this year attracted around 60 Orongorongo Club members with the assistance of some DoC staff volunteering their time to help. The main focus for this year was filling potholes and metalling the road surface. The DoC tractor was taken into the valley and based at Greens Stream and used to fill trailers with metal to be applied to the road surface. Another 4WD loader, kindly loaned by Porter Hire Ltd was located at Peak stream half way along the road and was also used for filling trailers. Existing culverts and drainage channels were cleared and also some new culverts installed.

Although a cold and damp weekend a great cross-section of people turned out, ranging in age from 10 to 70+ years old. The occupants of Paua hut provided continuous food and hot drinks during the day and all were rewarded with a BBQ and bonfire upon completion on the Saturday evening.

Marty Green, Orongorongo Club

Pest Destruction

In July 2001, three erstwhile innocents, already busy possum trapping in the lower Catchpool Valley, began to formulate plans to possum-trap an extra 400 hectares of mixed podocarp, broadleaf and beech forest. Arthur Ditchburn, renowned raconteur and yachtsman extraordinaire; Kevin O'Donnell, visionary and competitive Tri-athlete who traps stoats to keep fit; and John Rush, bush-lover and competitive walker made an unusual trio.

Opinionated, argumentative and abrasive to say the least, each set about planning their own programme to minimise predator damage in the area bounded by Graces and McKerrow Streams. Heated discussions occurred throughout July as they checked, cleared and counted possum catches along existing trap-lines. Finally they conceded that general agreement was impossible. So they decided that individuals or any combinations of individuals who might be temporarily agreeing with each other would cut tracks and set traps along lines of their own choice, so long as the total area got covered

Finally on Friday 27 July someone started by setting a line of sixteen traps along the Five Mile Loop Track. Which of the trio did it is immaterial. What matters is that Arthur, a believer in strong liquid attractants, provided the molasses. Kevin, through his contacts with stoat-catcher Ian McFadden provided the leg-hold traps. John and his redoubtable wife Evelyn provided tea, coffee and scones for the trappers and flour for the traps. A workable peace had been forged.

Next day, of the sixteen traps put out, thirteen had caught possums and another one was set off. The average weight caught was 3.21 kilos. For the next several weeks trap-catches were extraordinarily high. On one occasion nine females were taken, eight had joeys. It was a plague. The animals caught were so consistently heavy that the ever-resourceful Arthur employed a wheelbarrow in which to bring them out.

Kevin, the Tri-athlete, meantime cut his lines along the steepest faces, most-tangled areas of vegetation and to the highest points of the control area. Arthur, when medicinally fortified would manfully follow, roundly abusing Kevin for his utter disregard for life or limb.

John, on one infamous occasion joined the pair as they made their way along the colourfully-named, "Lost Hammer Track". Treading warily and hanging on to any and all varieties of vegetation he suddenly slipped off the precipitous trail and slid fifty feet into the bush below. Picking himself up, he waved a summary "Goodbye" to the others and retreated back to the car park and an early cup of tea.

Gradually the numbers being caught dropped. Lines were re-set less often and a semblance of control prevailed. Arthur set off one Spring morning for a new life up on the sunny Kapiti Coast. Kevin travelled overseas to attend relatives' weddings in Ireland and John got on with his seasonal mowing commitments.

In November 2001, with possum numbers well down, Kevin read about the destruction wrought by rats on piwakawaka (fantails). He volunteered to combine rat trapping with his possum and stoat trapping activities. The Rimutaka Forest Park Trust purchased a good quantity of rat traps for this purpose. Thus a regime of trapping rats commenced and is now carried out throughout the lower Catchpool and Five Mile areas.



Bill Milne with tonight's dinner!

By November 2001 with most of the possums dead, Arthur gone (but not forgotten) and John set on mowing lawns Kevin found an article referring to the destruction wrought by rats on piwakawaka.

Deeply moved Kevin cried out to the heavens and the trusty old Rimutaka Forest Park Trust came up with the funds to purchase a good quantity of rat-traps. A regime of trapping rats commenced and emanated throughout the hills and valleys of the Catchpool and Five Mile Regions

2001 became 2002. January became July and July became November. Arthur returned briefly only to

leave again, this time with a borrowed bicycle, neither of which have been seen since (though rumours of a sighting in Masterton still linger).

Possum trap catches, once as high as 76% dropped to 30%. Then from 23 to 29 October just past, the residual trap catch over 100 nights was down to 8.6%!

Today there are six stalwarts calling every week to monitor rat, stoat and possum traps throughout the operational area. Potentially exciting developments in wildlife translocation are being mooted; bird life is increasing and the recovery of flora burgeoning.

The Catchpool is one exciting place to be. To trappers, Kevin, Susan, Bill, Gordon and Russ; our mates from Doc Staff, Poneke; the Chairperson, Committee and members of the Rimutaka Forest Park Trust - thank you for making a difficult job possible, rewarding, cost-effective and exciting. Merry Christmas Everybody!

John Rush/Pest Destruction Co-ordinator.

Footnote:

"Arthur Ditchburn looking tanned and fit was recently cooling his heels in Otaki when John and Evelyn Rush drove past. A happy reunion took place and Arthur though finding work a bit scarce was enjoying the region immeasurably.

He was looking forward to attending the Trust's Christmas Party."

**Want to get outside, get fit
and do something fun?**

*Call Russ McStay, Rimutaka Forest Park
Trust on Ph. 569 2915.*