



TONGARIRO TIMES

The newsletter for the Tongariro Natural History Society
May 2009

Prepared by Sarah Gibb

Ohakune Old Coach Rd leads to RUAPEHU RAIL TRAIL

The walk in to the historic Hapuawhenua Viaduct is proving very popular! It is wonderful to see both walkers and cyclists enjoying the first part of the Old Coach Rd and in to the viaduct.

Since the opening of the viaduct in February DOC has kept going with some of the planned work and now the tunnel has been levelled and cleared of rocks, the dirt pile removed from the far end and a grill placed over that end near the railway line. It's a neat walk into it and feels eerie when you stand in the middle and look to each end.

A couple of weeks ago Sarah met with Ohakune 2000 and DOC and we talked about "the burst of enthusiasm" the viaduct completion and TNHS involvement has brought to the Ohakune Old Coach Rd (OCR) restoration project. Uwe Kroll, the Ohakune 2000 chair, invited TNHS to become part of the management committee for OCR and asked that we help them in completing the restoration.

TNHS accepted the invitation as our executive is interested in being part of a much bigger picture that could ultimately have economic benefits for the whole district and fit in with the government's vision of a New Zealand cycleway.

TNHS vice president Karen Williams has worked on a paper to convey our thoughts to local and national stakeholders. It says:

"Great Scenery, a rich Maori history, an old cobblestone road linking pioneering rural communities with a railway and native timber logging heritage are just some of the reasons that make this area special. It is now time to share our vision and promote the 'Ruapehu Rail Trail' as a unique walking and cycleway worthy of becoming part of a national network of high quality niche trails that people from everywhere will be inspired to explore.

A Ruapehu Rail trail, skirting the edge of the western side of Tongariro National Park – possibly linking both to Taumarunui and Turangi and Waiouru and Rangitaua, has the potential to provide significant economic benefits for a large number of small local communities in the same way the Otago Rail Trail has done.

A walking and cycle trail for both independent and guided walking and mountain bike parties is expected to lead to increased employment and the stimulation of investment in pick up and drop off vehicle services, a range of comfortable accommodation, friendly restaurants and an array of cafes and galleries. It would serve as a complement to the busy winter ski season assisting to provide year-round vitality to the region.

The community is committed to ensuring the benefits do not happen at the expense of the natural or social environment. Tourism, recreation and conservation can be coordinated to provide a powerful model for sustainability."

LET'S WORK TOGETHER TO FINISH OCR

So we are excited to work with Ohakune 2000 and DOC to get this route between Ohakune and Horopito finished. Some work has been done at both ends and we have the plans to determine how we complete the middle.

As usual finding funds will be a challenge but there is plenty we can do with many hands while we seek the necessary funds.

It begins on May 16, meeting at 8.30am at the Ohakune Railway Station.

The first of what will become monthly working bees. We plan to make it the third Saturday in each month.

So the next one will be June 20.

Tim Dodge, a contractor based in Ohakune has volunteered to lead these working bees.

Sarah will be there on May 16 and will bring graphic plans of what we need to be done on each section.

Everyone is welcome to join us as there will be a real range of tasks. In May we will be doing some planting along the existing track to the viaduct, filling in vegetation gaps such as near the tunnel entrance. Also some track making along OCR and removing roots along the track that has been started. And then of course we also need someone to keep the billy full!

Our day is expected to run 8.30am to 3pm back in Ohakune.

Any queries, call Sarah on 07 3866499 or email sarah@tongariro.org.nz

THROUGH THE LENS OF WILLIAM SALT

This collection of photographs resurfaced in 2008, found on a top shelf in a cupboard at Whakapapa Visitor Centre, the offices of the Department of Conservation (DOC).

The photos were found as lantern slides, in a red wooden box that looks purpose made and labelled William Salt, 1919, Ruapehu Ski Club. It is assumed the photos were taken by William (Bill) although he can be identified in a few of the shots.

TNHS collaborated with the Taupo Museum in developing an exhibition of some of these images, to share with others the history of skiing and recreation in Tongariro National park.

William Salt was a significant figure in the development of recreation in Tongariro National Park and a keen photographer. He died as a young man but his name is well known in the park in connection to the history of skiing.

Funding for the exhibition was provided by Creative Taupo. The exhibition has run through the month of April and 70 people attended the opening on April 3rd.

It is planned that the photos will be displayed either at Whakapapa or Iwikau later in the year.



First viewing - the opening night April 3rd

WHAKATANE FIELD TRIP

White Island (Whakaari), March 14 2009

The skipper of PeeJay V indicated that an assessment of the landing area would be necessary when we arrived at White Island, about 11am. A crew member had mentioned the broken-in-two concrete wharf we would clamber up if we were going to land from an inflatable near the beach. A quick trip round to Wilsons Bay ruled out disembarkation there, thankfully. The beach consists of large boulders.

Eventually most of us made it to the beach intact, without getting wet. It was an exciting beginning to our island tour after a rocking-and-rolling, two-hour voyage from Whakatane in a fresh south-easterly.

Our on-shore group was guided expertly by ex-accountant Alan Inman who wore a red hard hat. The rest of us wore yellow ones, and I noticed the stylier younger women wore theirs jauntily without the chin strap. We were told to never wander from the narrow path our guide took, as on either side one could fall through the thin crusty layer of ash and sulphur. Our guide had eyes in the back of his head because once or twice I heard him call back straying group members.

What a fabulous tour it was. The red and gold colours were stunning; the sight and sound of the steam gushing forth from the many vents; having to put on our gas masks. The Crater Lake's PH level was minus 0.1. It looked very hot indeed and a beautiful light green. We learned about the tragic demise of a sulphur miner named Donald whose boots were all that remained on what is now known as Donald's mound.

Near the ruins, the sun came out and clothes were gradually removed. An exciting short trip in the inflatable brought out the towels following our wet return to our 73ft vessel. We were given a drink followed by a light lunch and it was from then on that a party atmosphere prevailed for those passengers who did not fall asleep from their exertions.

The sight of dolphins to starboard brought everyone to viewing areas. There were perhaps 50 or 60 in the pod of commons.

The pace was on to get back to base an hour before low tide, and we made it, just. The friendly crew farewelled us on the wharf, and Annette and Roy were there to greet us and hear our stories of the day.

Tarawera Falls, March 15 2009

After the delight of White Island, more was in store for those who wanted to see the beautiful 65m Tarawera Falls in Tarawera Scenic Reserve. The eastern end of the reserve is located about 22km south of Kawerau. We carpooled there then drove through pine forest to the end of Tarawera Road.

Jazelle and I walked all the way up to Lake Tarawera, more or less following the Tarawera River the whole way. Our return trip took 4.25 hours including a leisurely lunch stop at the lake. The falls are said to be the most spectacular falls in the entire Bay of Plenty. The water gushes out of an 11,000-year-old lava flow after going underground for a short distance. About 20 minutes easy walk from the road end takes you to a safe viewing place where there is also some interpretation on illustrated tiles in a small rocky clearing.

The bush here is mostly tawa *Beilschmiedia tawa*, lancewood *Pseudopanax crassifolius*, kanuka *Kunzea ericoides* and rewarewa *Knightia excelsa* mixed with pohutukawa and rata plus hybrids of both *Metrosideros* species. It would seem that the biggest trees survived the Tarawera eruption of 1886. Some of the specimens have trunks with a diameter of more than 70cm. I also spotted a few mangeao *Litsea calicaris*. This species is only found from North Cape to northern Taranaki and East Cape but I haven't seen it on the North Shore yet. There are thousands of tree ferns including hundreds of rough tree fern *Dicksonia squarrosa* (wheki), and mamaku *Cyathea medullaris* in the light wells.

The track climbs up to above the falls where intrepid walkers without height phobia can be seen from the lower viewing place at times. From there, a number of large swimming holes come into view with easy access to many of them. I took the opportunity to try one out. Here we met a rafting group which had begun their river journey from the lake an hour before.

Further up, about 25 minutes from the lake, a patch of scrub contains common tree daisy *Olearia furfuracea* in flower and prickly mingimingi *Cyathodes juniperina* in fruit, as well as younger kanuka and manuka. I wondered if there had been a fire as the vegetation in this area is quite different from the rest.

We met at least 20 walkers coming the other way, including Forest & Bird's Hamilton branch and young families. Thank you, Roy and Annette, for organising this excellent trip. It was a fabulous weekend.

Margi Keys

BAT TRANSPORT TO MASSEY UNIVERSITY

In January of this year, biodiversity rangers discovered dead and dying short-tailed bats outside a communal roost in Pureora Park.

In an attempt to save those still alive, emergency transportation to Massey University was arranged where they could receive treatment for the suspected poisoning that had occurred.

The bats were placed in an enclosed box with a hot water bottle and swaddling, and through the aid of DOC staff and volunteers, transported to Palmerston North. Tongariro Natural History Society collected 2 bats from National Park and Turangi at short notice, and drove them the 2 hours down to the university vets. Only 4 young bats survive the trip to Massey and responded successfully to treatment, of which 3 were successfully rehabilitated and released back into Pureora.

The 4th bat is still undergoing rehabilitation and it is unsure whether it will be able to be released back into the wild. Tests have since confirmed that the bats were poisoned by a rat poison.

Jess Scrimgeour (DOC Technical Support Officer Fauna)



Short tailed bats being checked over by the vet at Massey.



CODFISH ISLAND

Chris Bell

2009 will go down in history as a turning point in the fortunes of the Kakapo, with a record bumper breeding year it was always going to be action stations on Codfish Island. In breeding years DoC take volunteers for the important job of minding the nests, which is what I did for two weeks in late February.

With 27 nests on the go it was a busy time, 32 people living on the island and everyone with a job to do! Along with the other nest minders, I was assigned a nest to look after, and each evening climbed up on to the island top to a camp and monitoring screen connected to a camera installed in the nest. Shortly after arriving on the island, the eggs were beginning to hatch. Of my two nests, one bird had had infertile eggs and now sat on a dummy egg to prepare her for accepting a foster chick, and the second hatched two chicks, but as a first time mum she didn't feed them properly and they had to be rescued and will now be hand-raised in Invercargill. While I was on the island the 100th Kakapo in existence was hatched and we celebrated with champers and cake. Although there is still a hard road to climb for the Kakapo, it was a great experience to help them on their way



Rooster, a male and one of six Kakapo successfully raised in 2008.

ROTOPOUNAMU UPDATE

Chris Bell

This season we maintained our network of bait stations over 350ha right the way from early September to the end of February. As well we have run a trap line of 50 traps along the walking track, this has been a great tool for showing members of the public the treats we are working against up at Rotopounamu track. This season the traps have caught 97 rats, 27 stoats, 1 weasel and 1 mouse.

We have always known that 350ha was small in the great scheme and so are excited that we are now extending the coverage of our bait station network to an estimated 650ha. A local contractor is putting those bait station lines in now.

Our mammal pests are projected to have a bumper winter feed this year because of beech and rimu mast, but come the start of spring we will be in a great position to hit them very hard.



A very dead stoat

TONGARIRO HISTORIC PRINT



TNHS members have an opportunity to purchase a copy of this very special print. Dave Bamford owns the original and has loaned it to TNHS for us to sell up to 50 copies.

This photograph by R P Moore of Wellington was taken in 1923 and hand tinted.

Entitled 'view on road Tongariro National Park, NZ showing Mt Ruapehu, Mt Ngauruhoe and Mt Tongariro.'

For those of you interested in purchasing one, we can send you a separate email with this picture in more detail.

Price per print \$110.00.

Packaging and postage an additional \$10.00.