

# **Parks and Forests Manager's Report for period ending 21 February 2003**

## **1. Manager's Comments [Murray Waititi]**

Summer is a busy time for Parks and Forests staff. Visitation in the Parks increases some 400% from the number of visitors we have during other times of the year. This summer was particularly busy as weather conditions since Christmas have been favourable. The ranging staff have been flat out over the summer period keeping visitor service nodes clean and tidy.

### **1.1 New Ranger for Queen Elizabeth Park**

Nola Urquhart left Parks and Forests at the end of February to do a two year stint with the Volunteer Service Abroad programme at Angkor Wat World Heritage Park in Cambodia. During the time she was here, Nola did exceptional work, helping to make Queen Elizabeth Park a pleasurable place to visit. Nola was also the first Greater Wellington Regional Council female ranger, showing that ranging is no longer a male domain.

Nola's replacement is Chris Muller. Chris has been with Parks and Forests for the last two years as Mobile Ranger, Western Sector. Chris is no stranger to the Park, as part of his duties as Mobile Ranger was to provide ranging relief services at Queen Elizabeth Park. He has also been living at the Paekakariki entrance to the Park. Chris' main interests are ecological restoration and spending time with his children.

### **1.2 Regional Outdoors Programme**

This year's events have been generally well attended, although several were weather-affected. Most events in the programme are being surveyed to gather demographic information of participants, as well as to gauge satisfaction and popularity of the individual events. Things to note from the surveys:

- Just under half of respondents are new park visitors.
- A significant number are from outside the region.
- Respondents are generally very pleased with the quality of the event.

### **1.3 Management Plans**

The Parks Network Plan was amended to reflect comments from the Councillor workshop in December, and was approved for release to the general public by the Policy and Finance Committee on 20 February 2003. We are in the process of notifying the public (through *Elements*, public advertisements and letters to interest groups and Iwi) about the draft plan and submissions process, and will be holding workshops with the public in Belmont, Paekakariki and in the Regional Council Centre. Later on this year, once the Network plan is adopted, we will start work on the Belmont and East Harbour park specific plans.

Internal consultation and review of the draft Forest Lands Management Plan is continuing. We hope to present a complete draft to Councillors during March. Work is also continuing on the draft Water Collection Area Management Plan. These draft plans will need to be presented to both the Landcare and Utility Services Committees.

#### **1.4 Belmont Regional Park – Takapu Block**

Work is continuing on finalising the conditions of the Council's appointment by the Department of Conservation to control and manage the Takapu Block in Belmont Regional Park. DoC wishes to conduct a land rationalisation of the area at the entrance to the block so that strategic decisions can be made about the area prior to the transfer of the Block to the Council. This exercise may further delay the transfer. DoC have asked us to contribute to costs associated with the exercise i.e. surveying. Once negotiations with the Department have been completed, we will report back to this Committee .

#### **1.5 Park Leases**

Recently, two major leasees have decided to vacate the parks. The ACTS Institute, who lease part of the Dry Creek entrance to Belmont Regional Park, decided at a recent Board meeting to cease running their operation at Dry Creek. This presents a chance for us to review future opportunities and enhancements for this entrance to the Park.

Kerry Walker, the dairy farmer who currently leases the Northern and Southern blocks of Queen Elizabeth Park, has notified us that he intends to vacate the property in May 2004.

### **2. Planning and Policy [Dr Philippa Crisp]**

#### **2.1 General Policy and Planning**

Anne Manley and Victoria Owen recently attended a climate change workshop (organised by the Climate Change Project Team which is part of the Ministry for the Environment), which looked at government policies and programmes for promoting projects that will contribute to New Zealand's targets under the Kyoto protocol. Central government officials and a large number of industry representatives, who will be involved in identifying and undertaking projects to contribute to New Zealand's targets, also attended the workshop.

#### **2.2 Environmental Planning**

Planning for the 1080 possum control operation in the Hutt Water Catchment Area is underway. The starting date of the operation is dependent on suitable weather conditions, but it needs to occur between June and September 2003.

## **2.3 Environmental Management System**

A report on weed spread risks has been completed by Robin Blake and Owen Spearpoint, while plant lists for ecological restoration projects in each park and forest have been prepared by Barbara Mitcalfe (Wellington Botanical Society).

Projects to be completed by the end of March include the preparation of a vehicle use policy and the inclusion of EMS information in staff induction packages.

## **2.4 State Highway 2 Realignment Earthworks Started**

On 10 July 2001 the Landcare Committee approved to pay half the cost of constructing a pedestrian underpass on State Highway 2 at Kaitoke, as part of the Transit New Zealand State Highway 2 realignment project (see Report 01.474). Higgins Contractors Ltd and Goodman & Sons have started work on the highway realignment. The contractor cleared the site of the proposed pedestrian underpass enabling survey, design and plans to be prepared. Opus Consultants will be getting quotes from the contractors shortly so we can complete agreements with Transit NZ for construction of the underpass.

## **2.5 Parks and Forests Asset to be Valued**

Tina Walker and Graham Laws have started work with the Finance Department to re-value Parks and Forests assets to comply with the new provisions of the Accounting Standard.

O'Brien Property Consultants will assist assessing values of land and buildings while roads, tracks and bridges will be valued internally. Following our initial evaluation, we will liaise with Audit NZ and arrange for peer reviews of our valuation methodology by external consultants. Once our methodology is approved, the asset information will replace existing data in the corporate asset database.

## **2.6 Capital Works Projects [Graham Laws]**

### **2.6.1 Construction of Kaitoke Toilets and Ranger's office**

We have received quotations for the toilets and ranger's office at Kaitoke. The contractor expects to commence work early in March erecting the modified design "Versatile" cottage.

### **2.6.2 Design work proceeding for Queen Elizabeth Toilets**

Architects are preparing working drawings for toilets at Whareroa Beach and MacKays Crossing, Queen Elizabeth Park. We propose to build the two toilets as one contract to reduce overheads and supervision costs. Both toilets will be completed by June 2004.

### 2.6.3 Munitions Bend Bridge Abutments Stabilised

Streambed scouring over several years had undermined the abutments of the historic Munitions Bend Bridge on the Rimutaka Rail Trail (about 5km from State Highway 2, Kaitoke). Although the bridge is not in current use – the rail trail detours from the original formation in this location – continuing degrading of the Pakuratahi River would result in further erosion and the eventual collapse of the structure. We employed contractors to repair the abutments and stabilise the streambed with rock and gabions to prevent further erosion damage. The stream works were also designed to facilitate fish passage. Archaeologist Karen Greig, documented and photographed the repair work for the Historic Places Trust. We are now preparing to repair the bridge timbers and to lay a footbridge along the upstream side of the structure.

### 2.6.4 Pakuratahi Car Park (Kaitoke Entrance)

Clean fill from the State Highway 2 earthworks will be used to construct a larger car park at the start of the Rimutaka Incline. Goodman & Sons will place the fill in a gully upstream of the rail embankment and extend the existing culvert, while parks staff will relocate the gate and picket fence.

## 3. Marketing and Design [Amanda Cox]

### 3.1 Regional Outdoors Programme

The promotional plan was designed to target a broad range of people through a number of media channels:

- The Regional Outdoors programme was published in the December *Elements*, and distributed to all households in the region.
- Event calendars were distributed to Visitor Information Centres, libraries, pool and recreation centres, DoC centres and previous participants.
- Radio advertising was taken out on The Radio Network.
- Public Notices were placed in key community newspapers.
- Press releases were placed with the print media.
- The events were advertised on various Territorial Authority websites e.g. [feelinggreat.co.nz](http://feelinggreat.co.nz)

### 3.2 Refreshing the Park Icons

With the new brand work almost complete, there was a strong impetus to refresh the current park icons (e.g. the Battle Hill sheep) so that they establish a visual link with the park name and Greater Wellington. There was also scope to introduce some movement to help project an active, enjoyable environment.

We have established a simplistic style, easily communicated via a variety of media. We plan to have the range ready for implementation by the end of March.

### **3.3 Park Information Delivery**

The new brand resulted in us addressing the ageing park signage, brochures and web material.

Battle Hill is the first park to undergo a complete redevelopment of its promotional information. The redevelopment will make the Park more visible and its visitors experiences more engaging and enjoyable. The material will also fairly represent the viewpoints of various stakeholders, including local iwi.

Through addressing the park in its entirety we will be able to assess how well all the material works together. The park will also serve as an ideal “exhibition site.”

Robin Blake has been taking photographs of wildlife, ecological areas and heritage sites for use in Parks and Forests signage, as well as for inventory purposes.

## **4. Environmental Asset Management [Dr Philippa Crisp]**

### **4.1 Control Operations**

#### **4.1.1 Pest Animals**

Professional goat hunters have culled 18 goats and 6 pigs in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Catchment Area (102 goats and 2 pigs last year) and 45 goats in Belmont Regional Park (121 goats last year). The Judas goat programme is working well in both of these areas.

The hunting ballot in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo has been advertised in the local papers and 148 applications have been received. The ballot was drawn on 19 February, and places were allocated to 40 hunters and their nominated partners. The hunting will run from 5 – 19 April and there will be ten hunting blocks available for four periods of five days.

#### **4.1.2 Pest Plants**

The pest plant Buddleia has been cleared by hand in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Catchment Area. Pest plant control in other areas includes:

- German ivy, buckthorn, karo, blackberry and Japanese honeysuckle in Queen Elizabeth Park.
- Pampas and karo in Cannon’s Creek.
- Sycamore, hops and old man’s beard in Korokoro.
- Buddleia, tradescantia, ivy and pampas in Pakuratahi Forest.
- Buddleia, old man’s beard and selagiuella in Akatarawa Forest.

## 4.2 Monitoring

Two enclosure plots and their associated control plots have been re-measured by Owen Spearpoint and Keeley Hoyle in the Hutt catchment. The abundance of deer-preferred plant species inside the enclosures, when compared to seedling growth in the control plots (unfenced), could clearly be seen. Bird counts were completed in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo and Hutt Water Catchment Areas, as well as in Queen Elizabeth Park, Kaitoke Regional Park and Battle Hill Farm Forest Park bush remnant. A number of kaka have been regularly sighted in the Hutt catchment (as many as seven of these rare birds were seen recently).

Chris Horne and Barbara Mitcalfe (Wellington Botanical Society) have completed a botanical survey of Martin's River wetland in the Akatarawa Forest. Owen Spearpoint has re-measured and assessed the health of the rare re-flowered mistletoe in Kaitoke Regional Park. Bat surveys have been completed in the Akatarawa Forest and the Hutt catchment.

## 5. Western Sector [Matt Ballantine]

### 5.1 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

#### 5.1.1 Maintenance

It has been a busy time on the farm with a lot of work being carried out by staff and contractors. A large amount of time has been spent on weed control, primarily thistles and gorse. With the improvement in the standard of fences on the farm, domestic goats are being trialed in several paddocks as a biologically friendly way of controlling the thistles. The goats nip the heads off of the thistles preventing them from seeding. Considerable fence maintenance work has also been carried out and the farm is looking neat and tidy.

Ranger staff have been able to put their new found shearing skills to work on the mob of sheep used for farm education. Members of the public enjoy watching the shearing, and the wool will be used as part of the education programmes. The lambs are growing well and the condition they put on during spring is carrying them through the current dry spell.

Numbers of wild goats have been observed in the Puketiro forest and the Ranger is removing these as part of his duties. There has also been a noticeable increase in rabbit, stoat and ferret numbers. These are being controlled by trapping and shooting.

#### 5.1.2 Ranging Services

Education programmes on the Park have been keeping ranger staff busy. Nine programmes were run for schools, which continue to be popular. As well as schools, there have been other groups visiting such as IHC, Kiwi Conservation Clubs and English as a Second Language groups. The groups really benefit from these visits and the chance to experience a farm 'hands on.' We have received a large number of thank you letters from those who have taken part in the programmes, which is encouraging.

Ranger staff have met recently with Civil Defence staff from Porirua City Council to discuss options for using Battle Hill as a base for the surrounding area in the event of an emergency. The Park is a logical mid point for the rural area and has equipment and supplies that would be useful.

Recently the Park Ranger and Manager, Parks and Forests, took part in a presentation to members of the Pauatahanui Inlet Trust to explain what steps we are taking at Battle Hill to improve the quality of water entering the Inlet. The talk was a good opportunity to talk with members of the Trust and since then, they have made use of the recently upgraded Homestead meeting room for several meetings.

### 5.1.3 Events Held

The fine weather has meant a large number of casual visitors are out enjoying themselves over the summer break, but there have also been a large number of events held in the Park as well. The Targa Rally went past Battle Hill and the Park was a popular point from which spectators could view the Rally. Horse riding is as popular as ever and approximately 700 people attended two large cross-country events held in the Park. In addition, there have been nine other training days and several weekend pony club camps held. The children really enjoy the camps where they can camp by their ponies and ride them each day.

The Wellington Area Trail Riding Club ran two events in the Park, which were very successful. The farm is a great place for beginner riders, while the forest offers a greater challenge for the more experienced riders.

The farm was also well used for the annual inter schools cross-country event and approximately 400 children matched themselves against each other over a challenging course. The Orienteers held an event over the farm and enjoyed the challenge it offered, with some muddy, tired people crossing over the finish line.

## 5.2 Belmont Regional Park

### 5.2.1 Maintenance

With the summer dry spell, grass growth is slowing and staff have been able to catch up with vegetation cutbacks of tracks throughout the Park.

Contractors have returned to repair the tracks at Korokoro, damaged during the December 2001 floods. Work now is focusing on the Oakleigh Street to Korokoro Dam section. An extensive section of track has been re-benched to allow surfacing and drainage repairs to be carried out.

## 5.2.2 Ranging Services

The Ranger has responded to a growing number of enquiries about the Korokoro Dam. Some people are concerned that the lake behind the dam has been disappearing over time. About ten years ago the dam lake could still be used for swimming, but today, silting has vastly reduced the water areas. Silting of the dam is a natural process and the area will eventually revert to a wetland and stream. The alternative is to flush sediment out of the dam, which would cause large problems downstream, and in Wellington Harbour where the stream mouth lies.

People are making good use of Park tracks, especially late in the afternoon and early evenings. Particularly popular is the new “Danzig” mountain bike trail through upper Stratton Street. Nevertheless, there are rare occasions when mountain bike riders injure themselves. One person dislocated an elbow during February while riding this trail. Ranger staff assisted this person until ambulance officers arrived. Generally there are very few injury accidents involving mountain bikes in the Park and the sport remains extremely popular.

## 5.2.3 Events Held

A very successful horse trail-riding event was held at Dry Creek in January. Around 30 riders competed in the event in the Kilmister and Dry Creek Blocks. Organisers, the Wellington Area Horse Trail Riding Club, are enthusiastic about the venue and would like to expand the event in future years to possibly make it part of a national series.

## 5.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

### 5.3.1 Maintenance

The dry summer months have stressed many of the plants that were planted over the winter. Releasing of the Arbor Day and remnant bush plantings are well underway. Watering of accessible sites and the nursery will continue frequently due to the strong drying winds.

The programme of replacing the old green picnic tables is well underway. Paekakariki has many new tables in the main picnic sites. Several were replaced at MacKays Crossing helping to improve this area.

Running up to Christmas, maintenance activities centred on preparing the main picnic areas and toilets for the busy period. An article on the park facilities will feature in the next edition of Elements. This will help to raise people’s awareness of what our areas can offer for events, picnics etc.



### 5.3.2 Ranging Services

Prior to Christmas, a team of people from IHC worked in the Park each Wednesday. They assisted the Ranger to pot on plants, release trees and do general work around the park. This experience is great for these young people, many of whom have never worked in the conservation field. They love spending time around the park and swimming during lunchtime. Other groups have also taken part in helping the ranger over the summer holidays i.e. church groups who stay at the camp ground.

Less desirable are numerous fires, vandalism in the toilets, reckless use of motorbikes and quads which have been issues over the holiday period.

### 5.3.3 Events Held

The first event of the summer programme attracted 27 people. They seemed to enjoy the occasion and we received a good write up for the event in the local paper.

The “Whopper Chopper” was held 9 February with around 4000 people attending. Cars were parked all the way to MacKays Crossing entrance with people wandering down to the site creating a concert-like atmosphere. The feedback was very positive, and the day will be fondly remembered by most. Good publicity helped make this a successful event.

Horse events were held throughout the month as riders prepare for the National Championships to be held at the Park during March.

## 5.4 Whitireia Park

### 5.4.1 Maintenance

There have been some delays in gaining authorisation to install stock fencing and a cattle stop from the Historic Places Trust and Iwi, so we have altered the work programme.

Work proposed in the 2003/04 (clearing of old fence lines at Te Onepoto Inlet and removal of the cattle yard) has been brought forward to this year to replace the delayed work.

### 5.4.2 Ranging Services

The possum control operation is almost complete. A few bait stations remain to clear up the last of the possums. A possum-detecting dog will be used to check and clear bush areas for possums in the next four months.

## **6. Eastern Sector [Fraser Oliver]**

### **6.1 Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests**

We will be organising a Councillor tour of the Akatarawa Block in late March or April.

#### **6.1.1 Maintenance**

Routine maintenance to water tables, culverts, cut off drains and vegetation control of all main access routes has been carried out where required.

A section of the Pram track known as the “luge” has had surface repairs, which will enable 4WD vehicles to pass in all weather. This involved removing deep ruts and reopening water tables. Road surface and water tables have also been cleaned out along the Deadwood Ridge.

Ongoing vegetation and track maintenance on Cannon Point walkway was carried out with help from inmates of Rimutaka Prison.

Liaison with the Plantation Forestry Department continues regarding logging and access in the area, along with regular liaison with user groups and adjoining landowners.

An upgrade of Rimutaka Summit picnic area and the Incline walkway continues.

#### **6.1.2 Ranging Services**

It has been a busy period with good weather conditions allowing good usage of all areas in both the Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests.

As concerns held by the general public surrounding the possum control operation in the Pakuratahi Forest fade, recreational use of the Rimutaka Incline walkway and Tunnel Gully reserve have steadily increased back to normal summer numbers.

Visual impacts of recent logging operations have begun to recede on the logged slope immediately adjacent to the Incline Walkway. Both Natural and Pine regeneration are now clearly visible. Increased wind velocity, however, is now evident within the Pakuratahi Valley/Incline walkway. This is having a medium term detrimental effect on not only the remaining mature pine trees but also the surrounding native vegetation with many trees being uprooted or suffering severe windburn. The effects will lessen with time.

### 6.1.3 Events Held

- 35 4WD events
- 5 horse events
- 1 car rally
- 2 army exercises
- 2 mountain bike events
- 1 school trip

The 35 4WD events underlines the importance of the Akatarawa Forest to the 4WD community.

## 6.2 Kaitoke Regional Park

### 6.2.1 Maintenance

The programmed road work has been completed for the year. Four car park areas have been sealed and all the roads have been re-marked.

Park directional signs were repainted in the new colour scheme associated with the rebranding of the Council.

Inmates from Rimutaka Prison were involved in removing gorse from the campground, plant releasing and track clearing. Walking access tracks at the Pakuratahi Forks and “Rivendell” were also upgraded.

### 6.2.2 Ranging Services

There have been two recent incidents of rafters being overdue from trips into the Hutt River gorge. One group was airlifted out after an overnight stay. Both groups left very late, were inexperienced and ill prepared for the trip ahead. To help remedy this, safety information regarding the gorge has been printed in the local newspapers.

Recent weather has meant the park has been very busy, especially with campers. Approximately \$13,500 has been collected in fees since Boxing Day. People have been generally well behaved. There have been only a few incidents of excessive noise, campfires not being extinguished properly and dangerous driving. After meeting with Rangers prior to Christmas, local police have been regularly patrolling busy park areas.

### 6.2.3 Events Held

There have been seven events held so far with over 230 participants. Guided walks have also been conducted for the IHC, the Zoological Society and several schools.

## **6.3 Wainuiomata**

### **6.3.1 Maintenance**

#### **Northern Catchment Boundary Fence: Work Underway**

Tenders are now out for the construction of a deer-proof fence on the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo catchment northern boundary. Rangers have already started cutting lines in preparation for the fence. On completion, the 6km northern boundary fence will deter priority pests from entering the catchment e.g. goats and deer. It will also stop farm stock from grazing in the catchment and hindering regeneration on the water shed periphery.

#### **Sledge Track Loop: Work Continues**

Where time has permitted, work has continued on the “Sledge Track Loop” in the Wainuiomata recreation area. We will probably be looking at a mid winter completion for this project. The loop will add a significant asset to the recreation area, giving a gently graded 30-minute loop walk off the main track.

#### **Nikau Track Upgrade**

Work crews are currently upgrading minor infrastructure and carrying out general maintenance on the popular Nikau Track in the recreation area.

#### **Catchment Weeding Programme**

A weed control programme has been undertaken between the Wainuiomata river intake and the Morton Dam. The key target species has been buddleia, which is particularly invasive on open river flats and flood corridors.

### **6.3.2 Ranging Services**

General ranging duties have continued throughout the catchment. Unauthorised public movement can be reported as being “minimal” with no major issues arising.

### **6.3.3 Events Held**

#### **Wainuiomata Catchment Tours**

Five tours into the Wainuiomata catchment have been held in recent months. All tours have gone well with good feedback from participants. The Water Group has been very helpful in allowing tour groups to use the treatment plant facilities.

#### **Orongorongo Catchment Tours Get Underway**

Three Orongorongo Catchment tours have now been held. The walk follows the bush road up the Wainuiomata Valley and over the main ridge into the Orongorongo Valley, taking in magnificent views along the way. From the base of the valley, you take a steep jaunt (following the old historic ‘pack track’) up to around 700m before dropping back down into the Wainuiomata Valley. The tramp is approximately 20km and takes around 8 hours (not easy by anybody’s standards). Feedback so far is that it’s a great circuit walk in a magnificent area.