

Report **05.159**
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Committee **Landcare**
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Regional Outdoors Programme 2005

1. Purpose

To report on the 2005 Regional Outdoors Programme.

2. Significance of decision

The matters in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

The Regional Outdoors Programme was the fourth in a series of annual summer events programmes and ran from 6 January to 20 March 2005. This year the programme included 43 events, 37 of which were run by Parks & Forests, or in conjunction with other GW departments, Territorial Authorities, clubs, individual volunteers or commercial operators. The other six events were run independently on GW land.

4. Objectives

The Regional Outdoors Programme contributes to two LTCCP success factors:

- *More people visit the regional parks* – through presenting “good value” engaging events we hope to overcome the perceived barriers which stop people from visiting the parks and forests for the first time. These perceived barriers include, having to think about getting to a new place, not being sure what gear to take, or whether they will enjoy the experience. Previous visitors appreciate having transport provided, the company of other participants and the expertise of the rangers and/or volunteers. They often remark on the variety and richness of the environmental setting in the parks, and the well kept facilities.
- *More people taking some positive action for a sustainable region* – we have found that working together to prepare for and run events can be very good ways of forming and strengthening relationships with individual volunteers, interest groups and clubs. Events are finite projects, can be organisation specific and are a way to recognise the work and skills of an individual or organisation. Partners this year included botanists Barbara Mitcalfe and Chris

Horne, wetland specialist George Gibbs, geologist Tony Edwards, the Friends of Belmont Regional Park, the Eastbourne Forest Rangers, the Friends of the Fell Museum, the Cross Country Vehicle Club and the Friends of Maara Roa. We would like to record our thanks to all our partners.

We continued to strengthen our relationships with Territorial Authorities through jointly running some larger events with Upper Hutt City Council, and promoting Hutt City Council events on our parks. Other GW departments found several events in the programme to be effective opportunities to educate the public about projects they are undertaking e.g. the Flood Protection Department's *Taming the River* tour of the Ava-Ewen reach (90 participants); and the Transport Division's *Bike the (Hutt River) Trail* (715 participants).

All the walking and cycling events in the programme are opportunities to get "more people more active more often", the national objective relating to improved physical and mental health. Even events with a different focus such as *Paws in the Park* and *Return to Rivendell* included a short to medium walk as part of the programme, to demonstrate integrating exercise into our everyday activities.

The programme also fulfils a number of short term objectives:

- A high (positive) profile for Greater Wellington with all residents of the region.
- Attendance levels that allow us to deliver an enjoyable and engaging experience to a wide range of people.
- Opportunities for rangers, other Parks & Forests staff, and staff from other departments to work together and have "face to face" contact with park visitors.

5. Promotion

The programme had a budget of \$18,500, which is applied to advertising, other promotional materials and event supplies. The budget excludes the cost of Greater Wellington staff time.

Traditionally the events are free or have a token charge for some expenses. This year we split more substantial external costs such as bus transport and portaloos amongst participants, which did result in some price increases for attendees. However this had no adverse effects on attendance levels.

Promotion this year included:

- A four page liftout in the December 2004 *Elements*, distributed to all households in the region.
- 7,000 extra copies of that liftout were distributed to Visitor Information Centres, libraries, retailers, pools and recreation centres. We also sent a copy to every person on our database of volunteers and to those who had

asked to receive it after participating in the programme in previous years (around 840 people).

- Radio advertising on the Radio Network which promoted the programme as a whole and referred people to the events calendar on the GW website. We also sent weekly updates to the Newstalk ZB *Community Noticeboard* and *Daily Diary* in the Dominion Post.
- Initial press releases in December launching the programme resulted in many events being published in the event listings section of the local newspapers throughout the duration of the programme.
- A large “monthly calendar” public notice was placed in the *Wellingtonian*, *Capital Times*, *Kapi-Mana News* and *Hutt News* at the beginning of January.
- Listings in the Hutt City summer events brochure and the Wellington City *Stepping Out* March brochure.
- All events were listed on our website.

Concentrating our promotions in late December and early January generated high awareness and bookings for events throughout the programme. If bookings for particular events were initially slow, we would publish a press release closer to the time, highlighting event features in more detail. In this way we generated at least 34 press articles and numerous radio mentions for the events - a significant level of publicity for Greater Wellington.

6. Attendance

Programme development started in August 2004, with a particular emphasis on keeping the programme fresh and engaging for a wide range of people. As a result we saw very strong attendance levels, often attracting people who were either new to the park and/or new to that particular event. Many people received the calendar and booked themselves into several events. Waiting lists overflowed for guided walks, horse riding, mountain biking and four wheel drive trips.

Superb weather throughout the programme put the icing on the cake, with an all-time low of only 5 out of 43 events being cancelled.

Key Result Areas	This year (Jan-Mar)	Last year (Jan/Mar)
Events run by GW (exc cancellations)	37	26
Events run by other agencies on the parks & forests (exc cancellations)	6	10
Participants at GW events	2448	1550

Average participation at GW events	66	59
Total programme participants	12648	10114

Strong public interest boosted our **new events**. People really appreciated the opportunity to learn about current GW projects in *Taming the River* (90), *Walk Transmission Gully* (limited to 35 with a waiting list nearing 100) and *Old Coach Road History Trail* (30).

The cultural events *RIP RAP! River Trash Extravaganza*, *Return to Rivendell* (120), *Poetry at the Pickle Pot* and the *Pauatahanui Country Festival* (est 8000) featured performing artists, an approach that works well in attracting families and younger people. The *Country Festival* filled some of the gap left by the demise of the *Whopper Chopper*, previously held at Queen Elizabeth Park.

More established events either remain extremely popular or have taken a new lease of life, as people seek new insights into their natural environment. The East Harbour, Kaitoke, Belmont and Queen Elizabeth parks' guided walks, Belmont's *Discover the Hidden Valley* and the *Rimutaka Rail Trail* (54) attracted many people – mainly in the older age groups, but there were numerous younger ones also taking an interest. The Pakuratahi and Akatarawa Forests' *Back Country 4WD* (293), *Karapoti Classic* (1,236), *Big Coast* (779) and *Upper Hutt Heliflight* (113) are firm favourites with younger people and men. Battle Hill's *Haveago Horseriding* for children (40) and *4WD Sunset Tours* (60) continue to be among the first to be booked up in the programme.

7. Feedback

In previous years feedback from the event surveys has been very helpful as we look to ways we can improve both the programme content and how the events are run. As several “favourite” events had surveyed consistently from year to year, this summer we surveyed only new events, or those involving transport where we had a captive audience. We also asked only one person per group to complete the survey, instead of every participant. This made the process much less onerous than before.

We do not survey events run by independent organisations on the parks such as *The Big Coast*, *Karapoti Classic* or the *Pauatahanui Country Festival*. Compared with our in house events these attract a large number of people under the age of 50.

As in the past we received excellent survey feedback from participants regarding the organisation, interpretation, environment and facilities. We have also received many unprompted phone calls, letters and emails from happy participants – to a significantly higher level than in previous years. There are now well over 1,000 people on the mailing list to receive next year's programme - another indication of the general enthusiasm for it however there were some areas in which we can improve – both in preparation for and during

the events on the day. These areas for improvement were mainly to do with communicating event details to participants, signage to, and at, events and timetabling of various activities.

According to the surveys, the top three sources of information about events remain the *Elements* liftout, community newspapers and word-of-mouth. **Attachment 1** summarises the survey results while **Attachment 2** lists some participants' comments that are representative of the comments we have received.

8. For the future

Next year we will be looking for incremental improvements. In particular we will:

- Review and refine the programme to keep it fresh and appealing with a balance of recreation, environmental, cultural and family events where possible. We will also look at ways of broadening the programme's appeal to a wider demographic audience. For instance, we know that the more traditional guided walks tend to attract a consistent demographic profile ie age 50+, predominantly women, so other types of events are needed to balance out this bias.
- Consult earlier with volunteer groups and commercial organisations to offer alternative experiences, build relationships and ensure we work together as much as possible in planning and delivering the events.
- Continue relationships with Territorial Authorities and jointly develop larger events that showcase our region.
- Move the booking officer role from the Upper Hutt depot to the RCC to ease the pressure on Upper Hutt and ensure better communication between everyone involved in the day to day organisation of the programme.
- Survey only new events or those where improvements have been indicated as desirable.

Given the high profile of the Regional Outdoors Programme we will also investigate the opportunity for related commercial sponsorship. This will help with promotional funding and be a way to equip participants (and others) with suitable clothing and footwear.

9. Communications

A press release highlighting the success of the 2005 Regional Outdoors Programme will be developed and released to the media. An article for inclusion in the next edition of *Elements* will also be developed.

10. Recommendations

That the Landcare Committee

1. *receive the report.*
2. *note the contents of the report.*

Report prepared by:

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Attachment 1: Participant survey results

Attachment 2: Participant comments