



# a passion for the Port Hills

Newsletter, Winter 2019



**A**rbor Day is a longstanding tradition for the Society and each year local school children plant native trees up on the hills. This year children from Ao Tawhiti, St Martins School and Cashmere Primary participated. The plantings took place over two days due to a hiccup with the buses. Despite some worrying forecasts, the weather cooperated and the children had a fantastic time. 400 trees were planted at the Latters Spur site at Victoria Park. It was wonderful to see the pride on the children's faces at the finished result.

Some highlights from the kids:

- 👉 "Ewwww mud... my hands are getting dirty"
- 😊 "Yay mud is so much fun. I love mud!"
- 😬 "I just cut a worm in half!"
- ? "Has anyone seen my spade?"
- 👍 "I've planted 10 trees today" – "That's nothing, I planted 50!"

Special thanks to the CCC rangers who organised the trees, prepared the site and taught the children how to plant trees correctly. Thank you as well to the Eastenders for digging the holes and to Society volunteers for assisting with the plantings. And, of course, thank you to the children for their enthusiasm and energy and to the teachers and parent helpers for their good humour and support.



Sam Gill-Vine and Archie Hayes from Ao Tawhiti School getting stuck in



Ranger Di Carter showing Harvey Sanderson from St Martins School how to plant trees correctly



Students from Cashmere Primary School hard at work



## Midwinter Dinner, Sign of the Kiwi

Join us for a 3-course meal on Saturday 10 August 2019 from 7pm at the Sign of the Kiwi at a cost of \$45 per person. For a copy of the menu and to RSVP please contact the Secretary on 349 3409 or [secretary@summitroadsociety.org.nz](mailto:secretary@summitroadsociety.org.nz) Bookings, including payment, must be received by 31 July.

## Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting took place on Wednesday 8 May at the Cashmere Presbyterian Church. President Bill Woods opened the meeting and welcomed members and supporters.

Following ratification of last year’s minutes, Bill presented his report to members. He acknowledged the sad loss to the Society when our founder, John Jameson, passed away in March last year. 2018 also saw the finalisation of the purchase of Tussock Hill Farm after protracted, and sometimes frustrating, negotiations. Bill gave thanks to our volunteers for the enormous contribution they make to Christchurch City. When we count volunteer hours from work party members, predator control groups, Board members and Predator Free Port Hills volunteers, the total is a staggering 9764 hours of annual voluntary service!

Treasurer Paul Loughton tabled the 2018 financial report and highlighted the main points, including the purchase of Tussock Hill Farm and the various grants received. The Society’s finances are in good order and we are thankful for the many donations received in 2018.

Anne Kennedy presented her report on Ohinetahi. Weather was the top topic of conversation in 2018. The constant rain kept the ground in good condition and the newly planted trees did well. However, 13 work days were lost to rain. The weeds of course also loved the rain. The work party spent the spring and early summer weed-eating tracks and waging war on other weeds, the main concerns being spur valerian, old man’s beard, passion-vine and spindle berry.

Graeme Paltridge gave his report on the Eastenders work party. On average, 14 volunteers attended each work day. Over the year, the team worked on a number of tracks and reserves on the Eastern Port Hills, including the Eastenders Track, the Harry Ell Track, the Scarborough Track, Rapanui Bush, Jollies Bush and the Crater Rim Walkway. The end of year BBQ at the rangers’ station at Victoria Park was well attended.

Ian Johnston updated members on Omahu Bush. The team worked a total of 681 volunteer hours over the year. Ian gave thanks to Tom Smith and Allan Witty who both retired from Omahu after many years of dedicated service. The bush tracks required spot spraying every year to keep the gorse seedlings at bay. The team planted 300 assorted trees continuing along the fence line below Gibraltar Rock. A major slip at Rhodes Track was also repaired.

Greg Gimblett presented his report on predator control at Omahu Bush. Trap catch has increased with the addition of new traps, better distribution of traps using a GPS and better trapping techniques. The addition of the Sentinel Possum kill trap has seen a large increase in possum capture numbers from the previous 24 months. Chew card monitoring indicates that the possum count is relatively low. However the rat population is of concern.

Jeremy Agar then updated members on Predator Free Port Hills. Over 750 households are now trapping on the Port Hills. The Society has joined forces with a range of other organisations and agencies to work together to achieve Pest Free Banks Peninsula by 2050.

We moved on to the Election of Officers. All existing Board members were re-elected. Please see the table for a full list of

Board members and our website for a copy of the reports and accounts.

In General Business, Bill Woods updated members on the Linda Woods Reserve including the new grazier, fencing, the development of the management plan and the opportunity for members to give input.

Annual membership subscriptions were also discussed. The Society became GST registered on 1 October 2018 which requires us to pay GST on all subscription income received. Membership rates have stayed constant for a number of years. Following discussion, members agreed to increase annual subscription rates to reflect rising costs and the GST component (see table).

Membership subscription type	New rate effective 1/1/2020
Annual individual subscription	\$25.00
5 year individual subscription	\$100.00
15 year individual subscription	\$250.00
Annual family subscription	\$40.00
5 year family subscription	\$160.00

### Honorary Life Membership for Anne Kennedy

By unanimous resolution, the Society’s highest award of honorary life membership was bestowed on Anne Kennedy. The Board had been discussing conferring honorary life membership on Anne for some time, in recognition of her many years of service to the Society, to the Board and to Ohinetahi Reserve. However, as many members will know, Anne prefers to avoid the limelight so we knew we needed to be surreptitious.

Therefore the President first presented Paul Loughton with his certificate, honorary life membership having been conferred on Paul back in 2010 but without an actual certificate being presented. The President commented that honorary life memberships were something special and we should award them more frequently. Long term member, Annette Foster, stood up and declared ‘Why not now? I nominate Anne Kennedy’. And it just so happened we had her certificate ready to present.

**Anne, your dedication to Ohinetahi and your practical, get-on-with-it approach is an asset to the Society. Under your wing, Ohinetahi Reserve has thrived. It has not been an easy decade with the earthquakes and then the Port Hills fires yet, throughout it all, you have shown good humour, perseverance and a determination to make the best of the situation. Congratulations Anne on this special award.**



Anne Kennedy receiving her Honorary Life Membership

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Following the completion of AGM business, we welcomed guest speaker Ruud Kleinpaste (the 'Bugman') who spoke on the topic of nature literacy. He reflected on the current state of the environment and the importance of biodiversity. He gave practical examples of nature education in New Zealand and how it links to other subjects in the curriculum such as literacy, numeracy, science, technology and many others. Ruud is a dynamic speaker and passionate about connecting children with nature in the age of technology.

Following the meeting, members stayed for supper. It was a chance to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. All in all, a very full but special AGM!

## Anne Henderson

Anne Henderson, Honorary Life Member of the Society, passed away in March 2019 at the age of 93 years. Anne joined the committee of the Summit Road Society in 1977 and took over from John Jameson in the voluntary position of Secretary/ Administrator in 1978, a position she held until retiring at the end of 1993. Originally from the UK, Anne migrated to New Zealand in search of adventure. Anne was a keen trumper and loved the outdoors, especially the Port Hills. Anne worked as a court stenographer in the age that predated computers, photocopiers and mobile phones. Anne was also a long-serving member of the Christchurch Tramping Club, and in fact joined the Society by way of tramping. Anne is remembered for her enthusiasm and her quiet dedication to the Society and the protection of the hills.



## Hamish Grant

It is with much sadness that we advise that Board Member Hamish Grant died on 23 May due to a serious cycling accident in town. Our hearts go out to his wife Leesa, two children and wider family.

It was a chance meeting with Bill Woods that led to Hamish joining the Society. He was a lawyer by profession and spent much of his free time on the Port Hills. He was a keen cyclist and encouraged others to get outdoors and enjoy the amazing views and scenery.

In July 2014, he offered his services as solicitor to the Board. This was a critical time in the negotiations for the purchase of Tussock Hill Farm and his offer was gratefully accepted. He was appointed as the Society's Honorary Solicitor. He was formally voted onto the Board by the membership at the Annual General Meeting in the following March.

Hamish was a champion of Harry Ell's vision to protect the Port Hills and provide for public access. A kind and thoughtful man, Hamish was very supportive of initiatives to foster the biodiversity of the bush and to improve safety and access for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists.

He was instrumental in enabling us to purchase Tussock Hill Farm. He provided his legal services pro bono, which amounted to many hours of work over the years. He was delighted when the farm became the property of the Society in October 2018 and was eager to see the reserve developed to its full potential.

Hamish was also the driving force behind the webcams on the roof of the Gondola. One camera faces east towards Godley Head and the other gives a western view towards the Sign of the Kiwi and Gebbies Pass. These webcams are available on the Society's website. He promoted the webcams as a means to help walkers, cyclists and runners prepare for the conditions on the hills and dress accordingly. Hamish was himself out every weekend cycling along the Summit Road and in fact on most week days as well—he would pop up for a lunchtime cycle!

On the day of his accident, Hamish was cycling through town on his way up to the hills. Rest in peace Hamish. You will be dearly missed.

Donations to the Society in memory of Hamish can be made direct to the Society's bank account: **03-0802-0104055-00** or by credit card through the secure website: <https://givealittle.co.nz/org/summit-road-society>



 <b>Summit Road Society</b> PO Box 37-115, Christchurch 8245 Website: <a href="http://www.summitroadsociety.org.nz">www.summitroadsociety.org.nz</a> Email: <a href="mailto:secretary@summitroadsociety.org.nz">secretary@summitroadsociety.org.nz</a>		
<b>President</b>	Bill Woods	03 318 4825
<b>Vice-President</b>	Jeremy Agar	328 9956
<b>Secretary</b>	Marie Gray	349 3409
<b>Treasurer</b>	Paul Loughton	322 7082
<b>Board Members</b>	Anne Kennedy	337 0364
	Melanie Coker	669 0336
	Paula Jameson	351 4221
<b>Representatives</b>		
Selwyn District Council	Bill Woods	03 318 4825
Spreydon/Cashmere	Lee Sampson	021 772 929
Banks Peninsula	Tyrone Fields	021 100 4590
Linwood-Central-Heathcote	Darrell Latham	326 6195
Port Hills Rangers	Paul Devlin	941 7570
<b>Eastenders work party</b>	Graeme Paltridge	384 3592
<b>Ohinetahi work party</b>	Anne Kennedy	337 0364
<b>Omahu Bush work party</b>	Ian Johnston	332 8319
We are a voluntary society working to enhance, preserve and protect the natural environment, beauty and open character of the Port Hills of Banks Peninsula for people to enjoy. We need and welcome contributions to our work through memberships, donations and corporate sponsorships, bequests, participation in work parties (non-members welcome—but why not join us as well!)		
Bank accounts for online payments and donations: Summit Road Society: <b>03-0802-0104055-00</b> Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust: <b>03-1592-0321653-00</b> Credit card donations can be made through the secure website: <a href="https://givealittle.co.nz/org/summit-road-society">https://givealittle.co.nz/org/summit-road-society</a>		

## Predator Free Port Hills

It has been a busy 6 months for Predator Free Port Hills. We now have over 750 households signed up across the Port Hills.

Over the summer, we focused on local community events. We had Predator Free stalls at a number of local markets, fetes and community picnics, providing information and advice and selling traps to interested locals.



*Predator Free stall at the Governors Bay Fête*

Coming into autumn, we saw a surge in queries. With the colder and wetter weather, rats started to head for more sheltered spaces such as houses, sheds and garages.

Over the colder months, we are focusing on events to provide advice and support to existing trappers and to recruit new local trappers. It is not uncommon to hear that a new trapper caught a few predators to begin with but hasn't had any luck for some months. A key part of our programme is the provision of ongoing advice and support. This scenario usually indicates that the trapper needs to try something different, such as moving the trap to a different position or using different bait.

In May, we hosted a Q&A session with Greg Byrnes, General Manager for Te Kōhaka o Tūhaitara Trust (from North Canterbury) and Anita Spencer, Predator Free Ranger for the Department of Conservation. Trappers had the opportunity to pick the brains of trapping experts, asking questions about trap types, baits, trap locations and other tips and tricks for success.

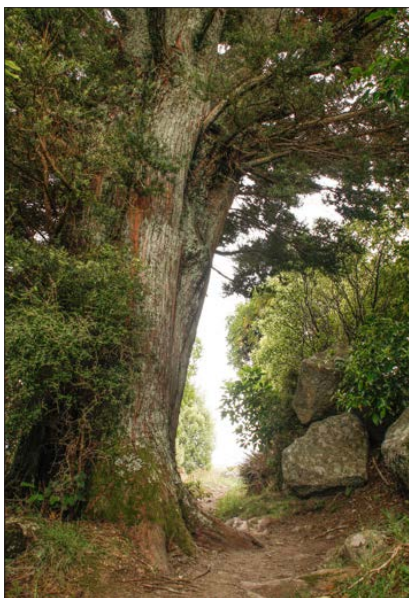
We have a number of events planned over the winter. Please keep an eye on the Predator Free Port Hills Facebook page for details.

In other news, we have been developing a new GIS-based reporting system. The new system is based on the model used by Predator Free Wellington. It is intuitive and easy to use and will reduce the administrative burden on our volunteer coordinators. Our thanks go to Sam Williamson and Reender Buikema from GIS in Conservation Volunteers who are developing this system for us pro bono.

In November last year, the Society signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Pest Free Banks Peninsula. We have joined forces with the Christchurch City Council, the Selwyn District Council, the Department of Conservation, Environment Canterbury, the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust, the Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust, the Cacophony Project and Ngāi Tahu Rūnanga to work collaboratively towards the goal of a Pest Free Banks Peninsula and Port Hills by 2050. The working group has been hard at work developing the strategy for Pest Free Banks Peninsula and tactical plans for each of the priority areas. The plan is to progressively eradicate predators from the Peninsula, with the Port Hills acting as the buffer zone. By 2050, the goal is that the Port Hills will also be predator free with Christchurch City as the buffer zone. It is an ambitious goal and it will require significant funding, resources, collaboration and community engagement to realise. However, as a grassroots organisation, we know that the winds of change are here.



*Q&A session for trappers with Greg Byrnes and Anita Spencer*



## Southern Port Hills Biodiversity Hub

The Society, along with a number of other organisations and landowners, has been exploring the concept of a Southern Port Hills Biodiversity Hub. Led by the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust, this project aims to bring together landowners, agencies and the community to restore a podocarp-broadleaved forest to the Southern Port Hills.

Both habitat restoration and predator control are required to bring back our native birds, lizards and invertebrates. The Southern Port Hills Biodiversity Hub aims to create 1000ha of native bush between Gebbies Pass and Rapaki. It is landowner driven and will focus on coordinating revegetation and restoration efforts so that corridors of native bush can be created for birds to move freely. The Society of course owns three reserves in the area- Omahu Bush, Gibraltar Rock and Ohinetahi.

While the project is in its early days and much still needs to be done, it is exciting to see the enthusiasm shown by local landowners and the wider community. The Hub's vision is that, by 2050, the Southern Port Hills area has a thriving and resilient indigenous forest supporting an abundance of native birds and invertebrates. It is a taonga (treasure) for the Ōtautahi/Christchurch community to value, protect and engage with.

## Partnership with the Youth Unit Christchurch Men's Prison

In November last year I read an article about how community workers (completing their community service) in Taranaki were making predator traps for conservation efforts in Egmont National Park. Intrigued by this idea, I met with the Department of Corrections Community Probation Service in Christchurch. They did not have the facilities to make traps on site so referred my query on to the prison. I didn't hear anything for several months and out of the blue I received a call. The youth unit for men aged 17-21 had taken on the challenge. They had made 80 wooden tunnels for rat traps and now just needed to add the mesh.

So I roped in my husband to assist. Following the necessary approvals, we arrived at the prison to demonstrate how to add the mesh doors. Those 80 wooden tunnels had now turned into 300 tunnels! We definitely hadn't brought enough mesh!

The young guys were really enthusiastic about the project and had a bit of competition going on about who could make the most tunnels in an hour and a half. The record is currently 9! They were really pleased to hear the traps would be deployed on the Port Hills to trap rats as they too want to see the hills thriving with bird life. The trap building is providing them with a sense of pride and purpose and an opportunity to work with their hands and practice their woodworking skills. They are planning a custom brand so that everyone who receives the traps knows they were built by the Youth Unit.

One asked me 'How many traps do you need in total'? I answered 'There are 20,000 households on the Port Hills so at least another 3000 plus extras for schools and reserves.' 'OK' he shrugged. 'I think we are going to need more wood'.

**Marie Gray**



*Demonstrating how to add the mesh onto the rat tunnels*



## Linda Woods Reserve

Tussock Hill farm became the property of the Society in October 2018. Renamed as the Linda Woods Reserve, it is being developed into an open space reserve for the people of Christchurch to enjoy.

Safety has been the focus so far. The combination of rain and sun in November and December caused rampant grass growth which became a concern in terms of fire risk. Finding a grazer was a priority. We sought expressions of interest and were pleased to sign an agreement at the start of the year. We are using sheep as a management tool to manage woody weeds and to reduce the fuel load.

We also engaged a geologist to undertake a rockfall assessment. This information is essential for determining what areas require mitigation and potential options for tracks. We closed the Horotane Valley Road entrance for safety reasons. This entrance is a shared driveway with the business next door and is regularly used by work vehicles. At the moment the best access to the Reserve is through Mary Duncan Park or from the Summit Road. We have applied to LINZ for a 5-year licence to use a 3 metre corridor of red-zoned land as a dedicated access way from Horotane Valley Road for visitors to the Reserve. President Bill Woods has been hard at work identifying fencing that requires repair and negotiating with the neighbours.



*Members discussing their aspirations for Linda Woods Reserve*

In December last year, the Board met to brainstorm aspirations for the Reserve and to prioritise next steps. The Board was very keen to hear the thoughts and views of the members. A workshop for members took place in February this year at the Church of St Mary in Heathcote. Approximately 40 members and supporters attended. Issues discussed included recreational tracks, the need for loop tracks with adjacent reserves, mountain bikes, dogs, horses, biodiversity, planting programmes, pest and predator control, cultural links, fire risk, volunteer work parties and communication with the public and interest groups. A lot of content was covered in the 3 hours!

Rockfall mitigation is now underway. The Board is also working on the development of a management plan. This process is going to take time as we want to do it right.

Members and the public are welcome to visit the Reserve in the meantime but note it is still undeveloped. Please make sure you read the safety information on our website before your visit.

## Ohinetahi Reserve

The wet spring and early summer saw phenomenal growth and it was definitely a win to the grass and weeds, with the Ohinetahi Work Party well beaten but battling on regardless. Track mowing started in October but by December the grass was waist high again. Usually mowing is not necessary again until autumn. Despite our best efforts, we are now only just catching up and can now feel the reserve tracks, except for one, are in reasonable order.

In the fire area, the broom grew taller but so did the trees that have been planted. An effort was made to establish broom gall mite to help to control the broom but it does not appear to have been successful. It has been successful in the Faulkners Track area where it has been established since it was first released. Some ribbonwoods and wineberries are over 2m tall and Coprosma robusta are 1-1.5m tall. Normally the kereru favour the Titoki Track area but this year it was party time in the fire area as the poroporo thrived and produced a bumper crop of fruit.

Hares have developed a taste for some of our plantings, with Coprosma robusta, kowhai and ribbonwood being the favourites. An egg powder and resin mix has been sprayed on the trees and hopefully the trees will be protected for the next 3-4 months.

Despite a broken wrist, a broken ankle, a broken collarbone, a cut hand and a squashed finger—not all to the same person and not suffered while working at Ohinetahi—work party members are now all healthy and in good spirits.

**Anne Kennedy**



*Ohinetahi work party on a well-earned break*

## Eastenders

The Eastenders have been busy this year with maintenance of the tracks over on the eastern side of town. These have included the Captain Thomas Track in Sumner, the tracks under the Gondola on Mt Cavendish, the Eastenders Track at the back of Barnett Park, Redcliffs and 'the donkey paddock', a section of the Taylors Mistake Track. Maintenance can mean scrub cutting, drain clearing, track repair, step making and planting. For Arbor Day, around 400 preparatory holes were dug on Latters Spur, Victoria Park for school children to plant trees and some assistance was given on the actual day to help the rangers and teachers get the job done.

Our current project is forming a new walking track on Montgomery Spur which is adjacent to the Rapaki Track. To be known as the Kowhai Track, it will traverse the spur and link up with the new Linda Woods Reserve at the back of Avoca Valley.

**Graeme Paltridge**

## Omahu Bush

This year we have continued our war on gorse and broom. Gibraltar Rock is 90% cleared of gorse, with the other 10% by the climbing face which may need rock climbers to get it all.

We now have sheep grazing in the grazing block which has made a big difference to the overgrown grass. The sheep yards have been given a good tidy up to make them workable again. We also fitted a new culvert on the track to the sheep yards to make it more accessible by vehicles.

As we have an extensive predator control program in the area, the Board has confirmed that dogs are prohibited from the Omahu block and signs have been erected at all the entrances to the area.

Plans for deer fencing are progressing. The next section from the end of the eastern neighbour's fence to the gate at the bottom of Rhodes Track should be underway soon and various routes for the next sections are being investigated. The tracks are in reasonable condition. Some drainage work is required in places and spot spraying is needed every year to keep gorse seedlings at bay. We are planning to upgrade the bush tracks where possible, widening and cutting back overhanging foliage.

Eighty trees were planted in May and hopefully another lot will be available in August to continue along the bank below the Gibraltar Rock fence line.

Many thanks to all our keen volunteers for their hard work and devotion to keep Omahu Bush Reserve the best block of bush on the Port Hills.

**Ian Johnston**



*The Omahu work party planting trees below Gibraltar Rock*



*The Eastenders creating the new Kowhai Track*

## Omahu Bush Predator Control

The Predator Control team continues to grow with three new members joining. Significant work has been done in 2019 to expand the trap network as a result of grants and donations. A donation in January from Canterbury Trails enabled us to build 10 DOC 200 traps to extend our mustelid (stoat, weasel and ferret) trapping network, together with other donations towards 20 rat tunnel traps. A grant from the Mainland Foundation has enabled us to install an additional 30 Sentinel kill traps in April. We now have a network of possum traps across the entire vegetated portion of the Reserve. The grant also enabled us to complete the DOC 200 trap network across the Reserve, with an additional 20 traps.

Trap catch from November 2018 to April 2019 included 43 possums, 39 rats, 9 hedgehogs, 2 feral cats, 4 mice, 1 stoat and 1 weasel. Total trap numbers are now 226. Further chew card monitoring was undertaken in June and the results indicate a similar picture to last time, i.e. high rat numbers and moderate possum numbers.

A programme of poisoning in bait stations will be undertaken during the winter to reduce rat and possum numbers.

**Greg Gimblett**



Setting up the new DOC 200 network

## Feral Animals at Omahu Bush

The Society has been aware of the presence of feral deer and pigs in the Omahu Reserve and adjacent land for some time. Over the past 4 months, volunteers have been undertaking more detailed research to try and quantify the extent of feral animals and the associated browsing damage to flora. The feral animal numbers in this area are transient and their presence at Omahu varies, depending on food sources in the Reserve relative to adjacent properties, as well as hunting pressure on neighbouring land.

An effective solution to prevent infiltration into the Reserve is to install a deer fence around the perimeter. This commenced in 2018 with the establishment of a 1085m deer fence along the eastern boundary.

The elimination of pigs and deer from the reserve will enable the forest undergrowth to regenerate naturally. Healthy forest is characterised by a deep covering of leaves on the ground which, together with decaying branches and logs, provide ideal conditions for emerging seedlings, ferns, mosses and lichens. This undergrowth provides critical habitat and food sources for native invertebrates, lizards and birds. Removing pigs will also enable populations of native earthworms and other invertebrates to recover.

Until the perimeter fence is in place, the Board resolved to implement a control programme in the interim. Measures include erecting signage to prohibit dogs and hunting (which could compromise public safety and disrupt the control programme), further collection of field information using sightings and trail cameras, advance planning for a perimeter fence around the Reserve to enable eradication including funding options, networking with adjacent neighbours to build better knowledge of numbers and transient habits over a wider area, and creating coral-type traps to reduce pig numbers. The fence will allow an eradication programme to commence for fallow deer and should inhibit further pig infiltration.

**Graham Corbishley**

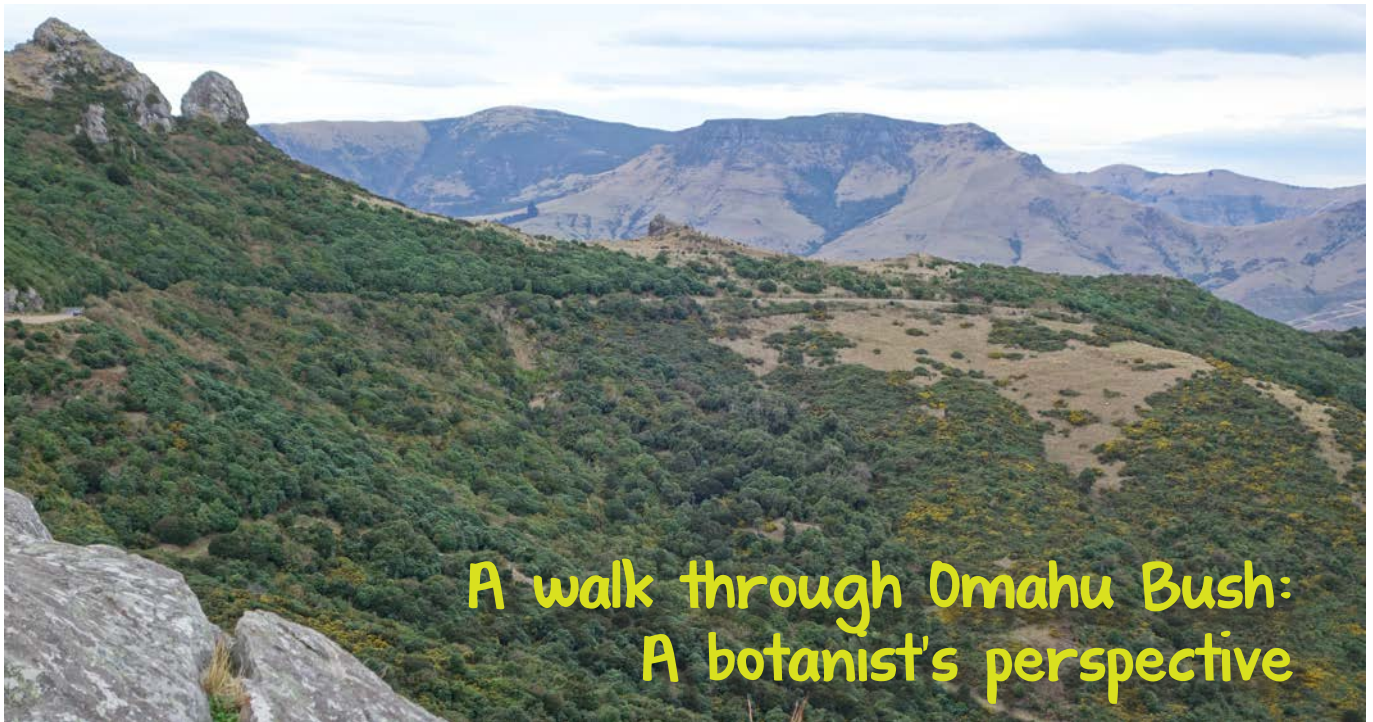


Damage to the undergrowth of Omahu Bush

## Heritage Walk 20 October 2019

Join us for a free guided walk on Sunday 20 October 10am to 1.30pm as part of the Beca Christchurch Heritage Festival 2019. Led by Paula Jameson, Harry Ell's great-granddaughter, this walk and talk follows the Harry Ell track from Sign of the Takahe to the Sign of the Kiwi and back. Learn more about Harry Ell's efforts to develop a network of reserves on the Port Hills and provide for public access. Please register via our website [www.summitroadsociety.org.nz](http://www.summitroadsociety.org.nz).





## A walk through Omahu Bush: A botanist's perspective

If it's a clear morning in early March, you should turn right at the top of Dyers Pass and head south along the Summit Road. Don't be tempted to stop at The Sign of the Bellbird. Keep going until you see Rhodes Spring on your left in its little stone roadside nook. Shortly after that on your right, the sign for the rocky prominence known as Gibraltar Rock will come into view. Pull into its dirt car park. Stop for a bit to look out at it, jutting like a dog's tooth from the hillside.

That's where you want to go.

Drop down through a little patch of bush and then up through open grassland—a mixture of natives and exotics. You'll follow the fence line for a bit then cut towards your target. You'll come across a remnant section of an old stone wall which will lead you right to the base of the Rock. From there to the top it's a short scramble up a rocky face at about the same slope as a playground slide.

When you get to the summit you'll want to sit there a while and enjoy the scene.

There'll be the electric, jacket-rip buzzing of cicadas near you, welcome swallows swimming around the Rock on the hunt, with the pure notes of bellbirds and the pretty gurgling of magpies rising from the nearby valleys.

You can look back East towards Coopers Knob, across the grassland, with dense, divaricating *Coprosma* shrubs dotted here and there like cattle.

Look South for a view of almost the whole of Te Waihora/ Lake Ellesmere and all the way beyond the far end of Kaitorete Spit to the settlement of Taumutu.

West there are the Southern Alps, with just a few strips of snow left on the highest peaks by this time of year.

North beyond the city there are the foggy, grey shapes of the Kaikoura Ranges.

And spread out at your feet like a picnic rug are the pastures, crops and shelter-belts of the Canterbury Plains.

It has to be one of the best views on the Port Hills.

But something's missing from the plains. What you can't see

out there is any of the native forest that once covered it from the coast to the Alps. That's pretty well all gone now. If you turn back south, however, and look below Te Waihora to the nearby valley where those bellbirds are calling, you'll be looking down on one of the few small and precious patches of native forest still left on the Port Hills.

It's Omahu Bush spreading from the heart of the valley up its flanks towards Gibraltar Rock. Along with Kennedys Bush Reserve, it's maybe the best patch of forest left on the Port Hills. If you take some time here, you will notice patterns in the bush you are looking down on. It is by no means a uniform green.

The short scrub patchily invading the grassland nearest to you is a blue-green with a very few flecks of yellow. A little further into the valley is a billowy scrub of reds, greens and browns—some of it very short, some quite tall.

And there is a complex mix beyond this—especially in the lower-slung parts—of truer greens; some brighter and yellowish, some darker and richer, but above all varied in colour and shape.

To make sense of these patterns you need to leave the far-spreading views of Gibraltar Rock and drop into the enclosing forest of the valley.

The grassland surrounding Gibraltar Rock is not totally devoid of taller woody plants. There are the dense *Coprosma* shrubs mentioned earlier (*C. dumosa*, *C. rigida*, *C. crassifolia* among others) wind-pruned on this exposed site into strange, balloon-animal shapes. But the first pure stands of anything woody - the blue-green scrub seen from above - turn out to be made up of gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), the well-known, light-loving member of the pea family which is here pushing its way into the grassland. Gorse is very spiny, widely-branched and bushy, with yellow, pea-like flowers, which produce a coconut scent that oozes thickly around you on hot days when flowering is at its peak.

As you move down into the valley along Prendergasts Track,



you'll notice a couple of things. First, the gorse quickly changes from near-pure stands where it is low and reaching furthest into the grassland, to older, taller patches with a variety of shrubs and trees—mostly native—popping through and above it. This is a well-known transition: gorse to native bush. The natives will eventually overtop, shade out and kill the gorse. Among the species rising through the gorse is five-finger (*Pseudopanax arboreus*) named for its big, broad, dark-green leaves divided into (usually) five stalked and toothed leaflets. You will find tree fuchsia (*Fuchsia excorticata*) too, which at this time of year has plenty of small dark-purple to black fruits, each shaped like a tiny preserving jar and which are sweet to eat with an unusual perfumed, almost turkish delight flavour.

The other thing to notice is that kanuka (*Kunzea robusta*) is spreading into the grassland too. Sometimes intermingled with the gorse, sometimes—and increasingly as you head further into the valley along Prendergasts Track—in uninterrupted stands. Kanuka has very small, narrow, needle-like leaves which produce a strong scent when you rub them between thumb and finger. It is kanuka that accounts for the billowy, brown, red and green vegetation you can see from Gibraltar Rock. Where you have a view out over the kanuka you can see that there are often few if any other native shrubs and trees poking through it in the same way as the gorse. And as you walk through the kanuka, if you can peer past the shrubs, trees, herbs and climbers enjoying the trackside light, you can see that the kanuka gets a lot taller than gorse while keeping the ground at its feet too deeply shaded for much of anything else to thrive there. There's a lot to see among those track-side plants. Among the climbers there is the five-leafleted bush lawyer (*Rubus cissoides*) with back-curving spines, *Clematis foetida*—a native relative of old-mans-beard—with shiny horse saddle-shaped leaflets born in threes, and pohuehue (*Muehlenbeckia australis*), its leaves more or less round, scrambling through and over other plants. There are shrubs, including *Coprosma rotundifolia* with hairy, round leaves that the sun has turned a rich purple in this well-lit spot. The flowers of poroporo (*Solanum laciniatum*) are also purple, contrasting attractively with its cheerful yellow and orange fruit and moodily dark green leaves. Herbs include a number of native

groundsels (*Senecio spp.*) including *Senecio minimus* which has quite narrow, toothed, green to grey-green leaves and seeds which are carried by dandelion-like fluff, and bidibids (*Acaena anserinifolia*) which are good at spreading with the help of socks and hairy legs. There are also light-loving ferns such as *Hypolepis ambigua* and the bracken-fern (*Pteridium esculentum*).

At about the point that Prendergasts Track meets Kirks Track there is a change in the vegetation. The kanuka is much taller here, swaying in the breeze and creaking like a ship's rigging, with its canopy cracking open a bit. There is light coming through now and a rich and interesting understorey of native trees and shrubs is popping up beneath. Broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*) is here with its large, round shiny, fresh green leaves that make it a popular ornamental and hedge plant. You can also find red mapou (*Myrsine australis*) looking a lot like another popular hedge plant and the small-leaved "pitto" *Pittosporum tenuifolium*, which is also found in Omahu, but having distinctive red branchlets. *Coprosma rotundifolia* is here too, but in the shade it has larger leaves which are green—not purple. Mahoe (*Melicactus ramiflorus*) is common, with quite large leaves and nearly white bark from which it earned its English name, 'whitey wood'. Abundant trackside is the small-leaved coprosma, *Coprosma rhamnoides*, which has leaves that are everything from round to very narrow to diamond-shaped. And growing thickly in groves is the truly strange lancewood (*Pseudopanax crassifolius*), which is most conspicuous in its juvenile form here: an unbranched trunk, with long, thick, very narrow leaves pointing sternly at the forest floor.

Eventually the kanuka disappears altogether (for a while at least; it returns where the track takes you through the younger and dryer parts of the bush.) It gives way to a rich, mixed canopy—the complex mix of greens you could see from Gibraltar—which because kanuka needs full sun it cannot regenerate beneath. Large patches of ferns are growing beneath this new canopy, the hen and chicken fern *Asplenium gracillimum* and a "hard fern" *Cranfillia fluviatilis* being a couple of the most common.

Eventually you pass a stream and tree ferns show up (*Cyathea smithii* and *Cyathea dealbata*—the silver fern). The forest becomes noticeably darker and cooler, and as you round a bend



Old growth Matai and Kahikatea at Omahu Bush

Continued next page...

**there they are in front of you.** Rising well-proud of the canopy is a magnificent pair of native conifers. A matai (*Prumnopitys taxifolia*) and a kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) growing side-by-side, column-straight, feet firmly planted and their heels pressed together like a soldier at attention. Unlike most native trees in the hills, these are properly big and old.

There are some good matai in Kennedys Bush, but there aren't many kahikatea in the Port Hills of this vintage that you can get up close to and admire like this one. It's a good place to stop and rest. It feels like you're in a proper forest now. There is plenty of good bush to come after this, with many lush ferns, mosses and lichens.

There are cool black streams, leafy shrubs, and of course many beautiful trees—wineberry (*Aristotelia serrata*), totara (*Podocarpus totara*), kaikomako (*Pennantia corymbosa*) and kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*) among others. And birds! The birds are enjoying this forest too. Bell-bird calls are almost constant. Kereru, disturbed and taking off suddenly and noisily are likely to give you a fright. And here comes a fantail, all black, switching restlessly from branch to branch, twisting on its perch, checking leaves above and below, operating like someone at a

garage sale trying to hunt out a bargain. Yes, there is plenty of good bush and bird-life after this but none of it feels quite as **old** as at the base of these two great conifers.

It's a tiny fleeting hint of a forest which used to be all over and which takes hundreds of years to make. It's heartening then, when you pop out of the north end of Rhodes Track, and look up towards Gibraltar Rock and across towards the gorse and kanuka spreading into the grassland below it, to think that at least the slow return of that forest is underway.

**Joe Potter Butler**



## Kids Talk

We decided to go on a tramp with my Mum and my sister, alongside my friend Alex, his Mum and his brother. We chose to go up to the Packhorse Hut and to be dropped off at Gebbies Pass. We got out of the car, it was hot and windy. After applying sunscreen we took a photo at the sign and started our tramp. On the way I found a large stick which I called 'Mr Stick'. He helped me to walk further with my pack. We ate lollies to keep us moving. Alex and I liked being up the front. It took a long time but we made it to the forest and stopped for a lolly and snacks. After the forest we made it to the hill side clearing, then another forest before walking along a very steep cliff which I accidentally dropped one of my lollies down. We finally made it to the hut and saw lots of sheep.

We raced inside and found a big table and a room full of bunk beds. While tea was being made we raced around on the rocks outside the hut playing games. We ate tea. After tea roasted marshmallow, smores were on the menu for pudding, they were delicious. It was late then, and we all went to bed with flashlights at the ready.

The next morning I woke up and played on my Nintendo 2DS with the kids while others slept. We had to be quiet as some tourists had come in the night before and were still sleeping. After breakfast and a small play, we went down the Kaituna Valley track. It was very steep but Alex and I ran a lot of it. My pack got heavy so my sister took turns carrying it with me. After our morning tea break and a suncream stop we came across our first creek. 'Mr Stick' helped us get



*Alec and his mum roasting marshmallows at the Sign of the Packhorse*

across. Each creek was bigger than the last and we had to share 'Mr Stick' around so that we didn't get wet. Later down the track I saw my Dad coming up to meet us. We walked the rest of the way together and did one more small creek crossing before celebrating with lots of jumping and shouting when at last we saw the car. I flopped onto the grass as I was so tired. Celebrating the end by eating my last two lollies alongside other food. My Mum and Dad told me that 'Mr Stick' had to stay there for someone else's journey so we left him behind by the sign (It was a sad moment). I will always have good memories of the journey we had with family, friends and of course 'Mr Stick'.

**Alec Ross (aged 9 years old)**

## Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust

(registered charity: CC27183)

It has been relatively quiet for the Trust since my report in the last newsletter. Existing funds continue to grow, if somewhat slowly with current interest rates. The Trust was established to raise and hold funds separately from the Society's general funds. The Trust's primary objective is to assist with ongoing Port Hills land purchases along with the secondary objective of helping with the maintenance of existing Society-owned land when other funding sources cannot be found by the Society.

For the Summit Road Society itself it has been anything but quiet as you will see from this newsletter. Work has started on the planning for the future use of Linda Woods Reserve, a major animal pest control programme for Omaha Bush is due to start, increased pest control work will be taking place at Ohinetahi Reserve, and of course, the Society's routine maintenance needs to continue. The Predator Free Port Hills project is going from strength to strength. All this needs funding, and the continual round of grant applications goes on.

The Trustees have had preliminary drawings done for a proposal to enhance the Society's Ohinetahi Reserve adjacent to the Bell Bird car park. Included in the proposed project are stone steps from the car park and a low stone wall as a memorial to Society stalwarts. When they are finalised, the drawings will go forward to the Society and the various official channels for debate and ratification.

Once again, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind Society supporters and all those who value the Port Hills that by remembering the Trust or the Summit Road Society in your will or by making a donation, however small, you will be helping to continue to fulfil Harry Ell's vision.

**John Goodrich**

*Chairperson, Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust*



**H**appen Films have recently released a 30 minute documentary film called *Fools & Dreamers: Regenerating a Native Forest*. The film tells the story of Hinewai Nature Reserve on Banks Peninsula, and its kaitiaki/manager of 30 years, botanist Hugh Wilson. The sessions in Christchurch and Akaroa sold out however the film will be released on YouTube on 28 July. For all of us interested in native bush restoration on the Port Hills, this documentary is a must-see.

## News in Brief



**W**e spotted a very cool fungus at Omaha Bush. Using the i-naturalist tool, Paul Tebbutt was able to identify it as a devil's fingers fungus (*Clathrus archeri*, also known as octopus stinkhorn). This fungus smells like rotting meat to attract flies to disperse its spores.



**P**redator Free circles were abuzz with the news that a kākā was spotted in a backyard at Mt Vernon in January. It is believed that the kākā was a juvenile from Hawdon Valley who had wandered a bit far.



**T**he Sumner Road reopened at the end of March. It had been closed since the earthquakes. Contractors spent 2½ years reducing the risk of rockfall and repairing and reinstating the route. Popular with both cyclists and vehicles, this road connects Lyttelton and Sumner.

the *biodiversity* of  
**OMAHU BUSH**

