Newsletter, Winter 2021

THE RESTORATION OF AVOCA VALLEY





We are delighted that our Jobs for Nature funding application has been approved. We have been granted \$650,382 from the Department of Conservation to plant 45,000 plants and trees over the next three years. The Jobs for Nature programme is focused on creating nature-based employment to stimulate the economy post COVID-19.

We are partnering with Wai-ora Forest Landscapes to deliver this project. Wai-ora staff will install the fencing, grow the seedlings in their nursery, and undertake planting and maintenance over the next three years. We will continue with volunteer planting in more accessible areas. Jobs for Nature will also fund the creation of a 1ha ecological corridor on our neighbour's cattle farm to link Linda Woods Reserve and Montgomery Spur.

This funding will bring forward our work in Avoca Valley by decades. Over time, we intend to plant an extra 40,000 trees and plants to fill in the gaps. Our sincere thanks go to John Marsh, landscape architect who has been instrumental in pulling together the restoration plan and co-ordinating the volunteer planting days. We have also been working closely with the Christchurch City Council, Environment Canterbury, Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke, QEII National Trust, ecologists and the Avoca Valley community.

We kicked off our volunteer planting with a school event in late May. School children planted 120 trees in the lower slopes of the valley. We then held three public planting days, each more popular than the last. At our last public planting day, over 60 people turned up to lend a hand! We also held planting days with the Avoca Valley community, Fletcher Living staff and the Eastenders. In total volunteers planted over 2500 trees. Wai-ora contractors will plant a further 9000 trees and plants this winter along the stream and will ramp up operations over the next two years.

A big thank you to our other supporters—Trees that Count, ASB Marathon, Christchurch City Council Sustainability Fund, Million Metre Streams, the Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust and corporate and individual donors. This funding has been invaluable

in getting this project off the ground. We are running a crowd funding campaign to help raise the remaining co-funding required. Please get in touch if you are keen to donate to this project.

By restoring the bush to the Avoca Valley catchment, we will create habitat and ecological corridors for native fauna, improve freshwater values, reduce erosion and sediment run-off, restore mahinga kai, provide recreational benefits for the community, and support carbon sequestration. The valley will be covenanted with the QEII National Trust and protected in perpetuity.

Marie Gray

Volunteer Planting Days







Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting took place on Tuesday 25 May at the Old Stone House. President Bill Woods opened the meeting and welcomed members and supporters. Following ratification of last year's minutes, brief verbal reports were presented. The reports are available to download from the Summit Road Society's website under News and Events. We then moved on to the Election of Officers. All existing officers and board members were reconfirmed.

General Business included discussion on reactivating the Activities and Promotions Committee and general promotion of the Society to the wider public.

Following the AGM, Greg Gimblett gave a very interesting talk on predator control at Omahu and Ohinetahi, reflecting on the approaches taken, learnings along the way and plans for the future.



Board Member Paula Jameson speaking at a heritage walk.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Board Member Paula Jameson who was recently made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit. Paula Jameson is a leading plant scientist at the University of Canterbury. Her achievements have been recognised with life fellowships from the agricultural, horticultural, and plant biology communities. Paula is a real asset to the Board, sharing her knowledge and expertise in plant science and leading heritage walks for the community.



Large dead spur valerian in foreground with small juvenile regrowth. 90% of the spur valerian has been controlled previously.



Te Ahu Pātiki

Congratulations to the Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust on their purchase of Te Ahu Pātiki (Mt Herbert and Mt Bradley). In a spectacular crowd-funding campaign led by The Press and Stuff, they raised the remaining \$120,000 required in less than a day! Additional funding received will be used towards the set up and maintenance of the new conservation park.

Harry Ell dreamed of a route between Gebbies Pass and Hilltop. The route was never completed. However in 2016, Te Ara Pātaka, the Summit Walkway, was opened. The purchase of Te Ahu Pātiki will ensure permanent public access for the last remaining section of private land on the walkway.

The Trust took possession of the 500 ha property on 1 July. They have partnered with Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke and Orton Bradley Park in the long-term future of the Park, with the aspiration to create a new Charitable Trust to own and manage Te Ahu Pātiki in the future.

Spur Valerian Control

In autumn, Martin Freeman and the Eco Abseil team undertook ground and ropes control of the invasive weed, spur valerian, at Ohinetahi Reserve. Regular repeat control visits are necessary to build on previous years' work to eliminate flowering plants and to reduce the seed bank within the soil. The sites are logged with GPS to allow easier revisiting. The nature of the terrain—steep, incised bluffs with dense vegetation (including significant gorse and blackberry)—means that each visit is time-consuming.

Ohinetahi work party volunteers also undertook manual control in accessible sites.

The results on site are very encouraging with a significant reduction in the size of plants and the corresponding reduction in new seed production. Seedlings are commonly found in the area directly under the old dead plants. The seed bank should reduce significantly over the next few years although ongoing surveillance will be required.

Thank you to the QEII National Trust Stephenson Fund and CCC Biodiversity Fund for funding this work.

Kids Talk A quick break at the Cressy memorial seat on the Bridle Path

We walked up the Bridle Path from Heathcote. Then we walked up to the Gondola café for a hot chocolate. The Bridle Path had lots of cool seats along the way. The views were beautiful. We could see the city and we also could see the harbour from the top. It was really fun and steep. By Matthew Gray (age 7)

SOCIETY I

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Bank accounts for online payments and donations:
Summit Road Society: 03-0802-0104055-00
Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust: 03-1592-0321653-00
Credit card donations can be made through the secure website:
https://givealittle.co.nz/org/summit-road-society

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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!)

Follow us on Facebook & Instagram - Summit Road Society & Predator Free Port Hills for regular updates

John Jameson Lookout

The John Jameson Lookout project continues to gather momentum. Our objective is to create an area where all can enjoy the iconic view over the Harbour and learn about the area's cultural and natural heritage. This includes the legacy of Harry Ell and the role of John Jameson and the Summit Road Society. We have also been working closely with Ngāti Wheke of Rāpaki to incorporate the history and stories of mana whenua. The area will also provide a gateway into Ohinetahi Reserve and the walking tracks on offer.

Over 2020, we held meetings with various groups to seek feedback on the design of the proposed lookout area. The landscape concepts were revised to incorporate feedback received and the results of an engineering survey.

The focus is now on raising the remaining funding required. A huge thank you to the Rātā Foundation for granting us \$40,000 towards this project. We are now on the final stretch to raise the money required.

Thank you to landscape architects, Graham Densem and Nic Kaye, and engineering firm, Davie Lovell-Smith, for their assistance with this project.

Marie Gray

Dale Every

Our condolences to the family of Dr Dale Every who recently passed away. Dale Every was a keen member of the Eastenders for over 10 years. In usual Eastenders fashion, he built walking tracks, cleared gorse and weeds, and dug holes for school Arbor Day plantings. He was a hard worker who loved spending time out on the hills. He particularly enjoyed the social interaction and camaraderie the Eastenders offered.



New Instagram Page

Earlier in the year, we worked with a group of social media students from the University of Canterbury to create an Instagram account for the Summit Road Society. Instagram is a very effective method for reaching young people in particular. As part of their course requirements, they created the Instagram account and linked it to the Society's Facebook page. They provided training on how to post on Instagram, created ready-to-use content and provided advice on how to make interesting posts for younger audiences, such as using hashtags and emoji's. As the students would say, drop us a follow.

www.instagram.com/summitroadsociety





Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust

The Trust held its AGM in May, and I was pleased that the Board members, Paul Loughton (Treasurer), Jeremy Agar, Paul Tebbutt, and our ever-willing and very able Secretary, Marie Gray, all agreed to remain as Trustees. I was also pleased that they were happy that I continue as Chairperson. As you can see from another excellent Summit Road Society newsletter, Board members and volunteers continue to work hard on an increasing number of exciting and worthwhile projects. The Trust has continued to support the Society where it can.

In the last newsletter I mentioned the donation the Trust made to the Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust/Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū for its purchase of the land incorporating the summits of Mt Herbert/Te Ahu Pātiki and Mt Bradley. We are delighted that this purchase has now been finalised. I also mentioned the donation we pledged for rockfall remediation work at Linda Woods Reserve. Some of this work has now been completed with our financial support, with the remainder to be carried out later this year.

The most exciting new project is the Society's success in securing a substantial grant from the Department of Conservation's Jobs for Nature Private Land Biodiversity Fund for a major planting project over three years in the Avoca Valley. The Trust has pledged a donation for this year, and for the next two. Hopefully, this was a factor in the success of the Society's application.

Many organisations have a brochure encouraging donations and bequests and we are delighted that the Society now has one. Once again, I must point out that both the Society and the Trust are voluntary organisations and registered charities dependent on grants and donations. If you and your whānau support the work that the Society carries out, please consider a bequest or donation, no matter how small.

John Goodrich

Chairperson

Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust



Map of households trapping across the Port Hills and Lyttelton Harbour



Talk by Tim Sjoberg of Pest Free Banks Peninsula on trapping rats



Predator Free Port Hills

Since the start of the year we have held three trapping workshops, seven community events and three trap building days. It has been busy! We have also held practical sessions with three schools and one kindy, building tracking tunnels. Kids are an important part of our programme as it is the children of today who will carry on the Predator Free movement through to 2050.

We have had large turnouts to our events, even more so since the Fight for the Wild TV series. People are really enthused about taking personal action to help restore our local biodiversity. Indeed, we are having trouble keeping up with demand due to supply issues across the country.

The total catch reported is now 6267. Thank you to all our volunteer coordinators and trappers who have helped make this possible. We are still in the process of bringing most of the reserve data over, so the actual figure is much higher.

The field team for Pest Free Banks Peninsula has now started. They will begin with the elimination programmes at Kaitōrete and the extended Wildside area in the south-eastern corner of the Peninsula. Work also continues on the feral goat eradication programme across the Peninsula.

Monitoring and trapping lines were installed in five urban parks as part of a pilot project with the Christchurch City Council. 81 predators have been removed so far. At our recent review session, trappers were very enthusiastic about continuing and extending this programme.

If you live on the Port Hills, please sign up to our community and backyard trapping programme via the website www.predatorfreeporthills.org.nz. The Summit Road Society provides subsidised traps for sale and runs regular trapping workshops and events to help backyard trappers maximise catches.

Marie Gray and Jeremy Agar



AROUND THE RESERVES OHINETAHI

Biological Control at Ohinetahi Reserve

Volunteers for the Summit Road Society spend a good deal of their time searching for and trying to eradicate invasive weeds in the Society's Reserves. This is especially a problem in the Ohinetahi Reserve which has to deal with more weeds which are 'garden escapes'.

Weeds by definition are often easy to grow, multiply profusely, and grow in a wide variety of conditions. Spur valerian, boneseed, Old Man's Beard and banana passionfruit are examples. All of these, particularly the last two, are a major problem as they smother existing native bush and prevent the regeneration of the bush. In addition, since the Port Hills fires in 2017 there has been marked growth of Scotch broom, Montpellier broom and Himalayan honeysuckle on open areas which were burnt over.

Biological control of weeds has been a focus of Manaaki Whenua (Landcare Research) and other scientific groups for many years. A broom gall mite which attacks Scotch broom was introduced into New Zealand some years ago. This has been very successful in clearing thousands of hectares of broom in the Western States of America. Ohinetahi volunteers were thrilled earlier this year to see that the gall mite has begun to establish on Scotch broom in the Reserve. It is specific only for Scotch broom and not Montpellier broom.

Broom, unlike gorse, tends to completely shade the ground making it difficult for natives to grow up through it. Natives can successfully compete with gorse and blackberry and, once the natives grow up, they shade these weeds which then die. Examples of this are seen in Ohinetahi and also at Hinewai Reserve on Banks Peninsula where Hugh Wilson championed the technique of allowing gorse to grow and shelter regenerating natives.

Three biological control agents for Old Man's Beard have been developed in New Zealand and were released in the late 1990s but two did not establish and the third, a sawfly, only established in very low numbers before dying out. A new sawfly population was imported from Serbia and released at Amberley in late 2019 and there are hopes this population will establish.

A fourth agent - a leaf and bud galling mite which stunts plant growth and reduces shot production—has been established in experimental shade houses at Lincoln. The first official field releases of this mite will go ahead in spring this year.

Summit Road Society volunteers would be thrilled if a biological control for Old Man's Beard could be established in New Zealand. The plant will not be seen covering large areas of bush at Ohinetahi by the casual observer but, without the hard work of the volunteers in removing infestations, it would rapidly multiply.

No biological control methods for banana passionflower have been established as yet. A leaf, flower and fruit feeding moth and another stem boring moth have been investigated in the past, and may be options for the future but are not on the close horizon.

In the meantime, if you want to join a hardy group of volunteers who 'exercise with purpose' every Tuesday with planting, track maintenance and weed control, contact Anne Kennedy at: kennedy@xtra.co.nz. A strong pair of legs and lungs are an advantage and the rewarding views at lunchtime are worth the effort.



Broom gall mite

Ohinetahi Work Party

The weather up to the end of April was worryingly hot and dry. The post-fire plantings coped surprisingly well and, while most survived, they did not flourish with there being no noticeable autumn growth.

After four months of hunting out weeds, mainly Old Man's Beard, passion vine and spur valerian, the team were glad in mid-May to change their focus to tidying and repairing tracks.

We are planting 32 each of mātai, tōtara and kahikatea this winter in the Cass Ridge area.

A new problem that has shown up is that, as well as the burnt elderberries re-sprouting, hundreds of elderberry seedlings are now becoming apparent under these trees. Ouch!!

Anne Kennedy



Volunteer Merv planting at Ohinetahi Reserve



Ohinetahi Predator Control

The dedicated team of Helen Hills, Brian Boyes, Russell Genet, Merv Meredith, Matthew Hellicar and Emily Trevail continue to undertake predator control at Ohinetahi on a monthly basis. We have a small waiting list of people wanting to help, but no trap lines to give them at this stage. There is scope for more trap lines at the southern end of the reserve adjacent to Living Springs and it is hoped that we can find the funds to expand the network. Our efforts continue to focus on the naturally vegetated areas of the reserve where bird populations reside.

The trap network at Ohinetahi has been added to over the past 6 months with the addition of 10 DOC 200 traps donated by Ryman Healthcare. The traps were made by the Men's Shed at Charles Upham Retirement Village in Rangiora. This has enabled the replacement of older traps across the reserve.

Recent tracking tunnel monitoring again shows low levels of rats in the reserve but does not fit with the rat catch recorded which indicates higher levels. Getting a handle on predator numbers is, as previously reported, a work in progress. Chew card monitoring is still to be undertaken to check on the possum index.

We will expect our catch numbers to go down during winter as we have seen in past years.

Greg Gimblett



DOC200 traps built by Charles Upham residents

OMAHU

Omahu Fencing Project

The Gama Foundation has been funding most of the fencing work around the perimeter of Omahu Reserve and their support has been invaluable. We have just completed 750 metres of new fence on the southern boundary of the Reserve prior to winter and improved the drainage paths for surface runoff to help protect the new fence and lower Rhodes Track. This new fence line is quite visible from Gibraltar Rock now but will blend in with its surrounds once revegetation gets established.

The last section to complete is re-meshing 1200 metres of an old deer fence on the western boundary of the Reserve. Part of this fence is on steep slopes and winter weather will influence progress, but 6 to 8 weeks of good ground conditions should be sufficient for that fence to be completed. Native regeneration is now quite prolific in the lower grazing block adjacent to the deer fence, so this will become a natural extension of the established native bush within the Reserve.

While the final link of the perimeter is being installed, we will also close out a list of smaller works associated with access gates, stormwater management, slip control and maintenance access. We have been monitoring the performance of the completed sections of perimeter fence over the past 12 months using trail and wi-fi cameras. The information collected from that has identified some minor work that needs to be done to improve the ability of the fence to prevent feral ungulates from entering the Reserve. There is no substitute for objective information to help make evidence-based decisions for enhancing the performance of the fence and the video footage of feral ungulate interaction with the new fence has been particularly valuable.

Exclusion of feral ungulates using conventional fencing is not a simple task and it is also quite expensive. Predator fences are effective, but much more expensive to construct and maintain. Omahu's perimeter fence is more of a hybrid for feral pigs and deer but will not exclude predators. The perimeter fence at Otahuna is also almost completed and this means there will be approximately 300 hectares of protected area (Omahu and Otahuna combined). Once fencing is complete, there will be a process to remove remaining internal feral ungulate populations.

We have and will share our experiences and knowledge with others who are dealing with similar issues, but there is another challenge. Feral goats are listed as a pest in Canterbury's Regional Pest Management Plan 2018-2038 as a site-led pest for the Banks Peninsula. These ungulates have high breeding rates and can quickly grow in population. There is funding support for controlling/eliminating them. Luckily, feral goats have already been eliminated from Omahu and Otahuna. Feral pigs and deer are only declared as an "organisms of interest" and populations are being monitored to gain a picture of their presence and distribution in the Canterbury region. Pigs also have high breeding rates in suitable conditions and populations can quickly get out of control. They can roam many kilometres in a week to find food, habitat, or for mating. Environment Canterbury's monitoring of "organisms of interest" is meant to support informed decision-making about future pest management. So, our challenge is to make sure decision makers really understand our (and Otahuna's) observations and experiences to input into their monitoring process to see if that can influence any future changes.

Graham Corbishley



The new fence at Omahu Bush

Omahu Work Party

The new perimeter fence is nearly complete, leaving the north-western deer fence to be rewired when the weather improves. The new fence lines have made an excellent nursery for gorse seedlings. A lot have been sprayed but a lot more will need spraying in the spring, always an ongoing project.

We have had two planting days. A big thanks to Helen Hills for the donation of plants for the second day and the 12 volunteers who planted them. Helen also offered planting tips to ensure good survival rates. We plan to have another day to plant some of the areas that are prone to slips between the new fence and the Summit Road.

A start has been made on the proposed track along the old stone wall on the north-western side of Gibraltar Rock down to the lower end of Prendergasts Track. We have blazed a trail through a patch of gorse which now needs widening to make a trail to meet up with the rocky slope on the downhill side. Ten metres near the top of Kirks Track was rooted out by the pigs. This has been repaired with a retaining wall and re-grassed.

The Kubota broke down on a very slippery slope half way down the hill. We have had to wait for conditions to improve sufficiently to recover it. It is now away for repairs to its transmission.

Thanks for the ongoing support of our team of volunteers during the year.

lan Johnston

Omahu Bush Predator Control

I continue to greatly appreciate the dedication of the eight core volunteers who undertake the four weekly trap runs at Omahu Bush, in all weathers, together with the other tasks that go with maintaining a trap network and predator control plan. We welcomed Richard Mallet and Andy Stace to our group in 2021 and they have already proved to be keen reliable members.

Recently we have had an influx of volunteers expressing an interest in helping us with Predator Control and we are endeavouring to involve them whilst having sufficient numbers to undertake our current areas.

We continue to experience significant re-invasion of possums, in particular since we poisoned in August 2020. Rat numbers have been kept low (6 or less per month) until March when we saw a significant increase (16). Recent monitoring results for June were RTC (possum) at 4.2 and rats (TT) at 3%. Both are regarded as low. We plan to repeat the tracking tunnels (TT) to confirm the low rat population recorded in the tracking tunnels.

Pigs continue to be a significant issue for us, as they now target the possums caught in our traps. The sooner the deer fence is completed and these feral animals are eradicated, the better.

Our network of traps sits at 256, a slight increase in the past six months. We have been fortunate to have received a very generous donation of 10 DOC 200 traps from Ryman Healthcare. These will extend our mustelid control network across the Reserve. We have settled now into a maintenance routine at Omahu, after many years of expansion. The team recently met and we discussed the next steps for predator control at Omahu.

Greg Gimblett



Omahu work party undertaking repairs to Kirks Track

EASTENDERS

The Eastenders work party group meets twice monthly to work on Port Hills tracks and Reserves that come under either the CCC Parks and Reserves or the Summit Road Society's control. For the first six months of 2021 the team worked on a number of different tracks and reserves. The Captain Thomas Track at the head of Sumner required three work parties to attend to the drains which required clearing of vegetation and silt infill. The Taylors Mistake Track required two work parties to clear drains, realign steps and cut back encroaching vegetation. One work party on the Hidden Valley Track (that leads off Bowenvale Valley) was needed to maintain the track surface and clear drains. Another was required to clear scrub at the Horotane entrance of the Linda Woods Reserve to make it ready for fencing. There was also the "annual hole dig" at Victoria Park where we dug over 200 holes in preparation for the Arbor Day planting of native trees by school children. Two work parties fell on public holidays (not worked) and two were cancelled because of the weather. On average there were 14 volunteers for each work party.

Graeme Paltridge



The Eastenders clearing boxthorn at Linda Woods Reserve



SUMMIT ROAD SOCIETY EVENTS

It has been a busy year for events for Society members. If you would like to join the Activities & Promotions Committee, please contact the Secretary.

Omahu Biodiversity Monitoring

Members of the Society were treated to an evening of talks in June on biodiversity monitoring at Omahu Bush. Andrew Crossland, Christchurch City Council Park Ranger, has been undertaking bird surveys at Omahu since 2003, measuring the number of native and introduced birds. Kererū. tomtit and bellbird have had sizeable increases and this is probably due to the intensification of predator and pest control in the reserve. Alice Shanks of the QEII National Trust then showed a series of photographs over 20 years which demonstrated regeneration of Omahu Bush over time and the importance of pest control. We finished with a light supper. We have had requests for a similar talk for Ohinetahi next year! Photo: Alice Shanks presentation on

Sign of the Takahe Midwinter Dinner

The mid-winter dinner returned to the Sign of the Takahe for the first time in many years. Members enjoyed a delicious meal and good conversation in one of Harry Ell's historic rest houses.

vegetation monitoring at Omahu Bush.

Heritage Walk Walking in Harry Ell's Footsteps

Sunday 10 Oct 9.30am-2pm











Marshal Station Port Hills Ultra

Society volunteers ran the aid station at the Sign of the Bellbird carpark and assisted as course marshals for the Port Hills Ultra Marathon. This was a fundraising opportunity for the Society. Participants ran a 100km, 75km or 50km race across the Port Hills from Omahu Bush to Godley Head so encouragement and support was much appreciated. Thank you to our volunteers for their support. It was a fun day.

Walk Avoca Valley

In May, John Marsh led a guided walk for Society members to Avoca Valley to visit the proposed planting areas. We met in Duncan Park then headed up to the entrance of Linda Woods Reserve. We followed an old 4WD track most of the way before detouring onto sheep tracks in order to explore the upper sections of the reserve. The areas near the Summit Road are particularly stunning with native flora flourishing on the south facing rocky outcrops.

Arbor Day

Last year's Arbor Day event was cancelled due to Covid-19 so we were delighted to be able to resume our annual school planting with the Christchurch City Council rangers and local school children. Eighty children from Cashmere Primary and Ao Tawhiti planted trees at Latters Spur in Victoria Park with support from the rangers, parents and Society volunteers. It was only a few days after the weather bomb that hit Christchurch but luckily the day was clear and sunny and the soil soft and damp. Thank you to the Eastenders for digging the holes.

Photo: Ao Tawhiti students planting at Latters Spur.

Photo: Cashmere Primary School students hard at work.

This walk is part of the Christchurch Heritage Festival. The theme is People and Place – our stories revealed. Starting at the Sign of the Bellbird, this walk will follow Ellas Track in Ohinetahi Reserve before meeting up with the Crater Rim Walkway to continue on to the Sign of the Kiwi. Walkers will return to the Sign of the Bellbird via a loop track. The walk will be led by Board member and Harry Ell's great granddaughter, Paula Jameson and will focus on Harry Ell and the Summit Road Society's efforts to protect the Port Hills.

The walk offers spectacular views of both the harbour and city and provides an ideal backdrop for the stories of this special place.

The 9km return walk will follow a well-formed tramping track with undulating terrain and some rocky and muddy sections. Walkers need to be reasonably fit, wear sturdy walking/tramping shoes and dress for the conditions.

To register, please email secretary@summitroadsociety.org.nz or phone 03 349 3409.