



## **Matakohē-Limestone Island Rangers' Report November 2016**

**New kitchen cabinetry, dirty carburettors, water blaster parts, salted rabbit and Tsunami Sirens. Bring on Summer!**

### **Visitors and Volunteers**

In the last report we noted the successful Kiwi Morning Tea we hosted on the island in October which raised more than \$600. Thanks to the efforts of Abi Monteith the DOC Community Ranger in Whangarei, fundraising of several hundred dollars by Glenbervie Primary School through their own Save the Kiwi Month event (which included a visit by Rolf Fuchs from DOC, and Robert Webb of the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery Centre with Sparky the One-legged Kiwi) has been gifted to the island. A big thanks to the Glenbervie Primary School Whanau and Abi for thinking of us, and we look forward to hosting the Year 1 and 2s on the island in late November.

Another shout-out to former Ranger Bernie who assisted Jono with sourcing some much needed parts for the tractor-mounted spray unit (and thanks also to AES Waterblasters Ltd for so quickly supplying the parts). Once the sprayer was up and running Bernie also undertook some spraying for us around the northern bait stations. While we got the spray unit running, the outboard on the 13 foot runabout started giving us increasing trouble; it wouldn't idle and was needing to be run at full-throttle to avoid stalling. Thanks to Marine North for such a quick turnaround on sorting the fouled carburettor and now she's running sweet again.

Dwane and John from the FOMLI committee returned to finish installing the new kitchen cabinetry and it is now all in. With just a little bit of extra storage space and a slightly larger sink in a slightly different orientation it's a great improvement. We also had Lew over from Gas Works Ltd in Whangarei to service the LPG system and appliances in the house; thanks for the fast and friendly service.

The island had a lovely visit with a group from the Tutukaka Coast Playcentre which both Charlie and Quincy attended in the past and where Quincy still has some good friends. It's always a pleasure to see the wee ones investigating the ruins with their parents and great when our kids feel they can lead some of the tour (having heard the spiel from us over and over, over the last few months).

We also had a huge couple of weeks with almost 250 students, teachers and parents from Whangarei Primary and Waipu Primary School visiting over four days. With smaller groups Jono does most of the talking but given the numbers we went for a divide and conquer approach and split the groups up for touring the top of the island, including the pa and petrel station. This seemed to work well for managing the numbers and the time taken to tour the island. Everyone had a great time, the weather played ball and it was great to see the enthusiasm of all who visited, the responses of the 'city kids' to the island and harbour, and the several rousing haka and outstanding waiata we were afforded in thanks!



**Whangarei Primary visits**

We were lucky to be able to buy some rabbits from Glen Coulston which Bernie kindly chopped and salted before Emma dried and bagged them a few days later. Chairperson Pam Stevens' freezer is now re-supplied with salted rabbit for the next few months. If anyone reading this report knows of any free rabbits up for grabs, please get in touch.

Emma, the Wednesday volunteers and the student volunteers have worked really hard over the last few months re-cutting and marking the hundreds of bait stations on the island, and this month we organised our first evening "mouse bust" to re-bait the northern lines, while the Wednesday Volunteers undertook the re-baiting through the bush on the south side. Tammy has finished up with us having been a great help over the last few months and is a credit to NorthTec. Dave also came over to do the mowing of the northern fire breaks and tracks and we greatly appreciate his enthusiasm for the work. Andrew and Murray from Northland Parkcare have been over this month to get things ship-shape for summer.

We had a wedding proposal in the Manager's House ruin one Sunday evening. The prospective groom arranged for his friends and family to "dress" several rooms of the house in advance of the proposal and a romantic dinner for two, while he and his prospective bride toured the other side of the island, finishing up at the house to pop the question and have dinner (the food was delivered by boat, once it was selected from the menu of a local eatery). It must have been a success as the merriment continued into the night.

Finally we had the last FOMLI committee meeting of the year and an island walk around to visit some adoptaspots and other project areas. We had a potluck dinner together and Bernie, about to depart on his great road tripping adventure around the South Island, was presented with some essential kit in thanks for all his hard work - a PLB from the Committee so they can always track him down to make a cheesecake, and a driftwood key hook from the Carpenter Boys so he will never lose the keys for his truck.



**Bernie's send-off**

## **Predator Control**

Emma and the volunteers undertook rodent indexing using the tracking tunnels which showed a measurable number of mice but no rats on the island. However Michelle and the Onerahi trappers report a boom in rat numbers on their side so we will wait with baited breath (and traps) to see what makes its way over here. We are so grateful for the Onerahi trappers' work on this very important buffer and we always make a point of talking about their exertions when discussing the island predator control with tour parties.

## **Flora and Fauna**

### **Plants**

Planning for planting next year is well underway. The plant order is in with Tawapou Coastal Natives Nursery and we look forward to taking delivery of the plants next winter for another round of restoration planting.

Jono cleared an area (archaeologically and botanically) between the school site and the eastern 'helipad' for Kaumātua Freddie Tito, other Te Parawhau Kaumātua and Kuia and supporters of the Onerahi Food Forest to plant a couple of rows of heritage kumara varieties, scheduled to occur on 22 November. This will be the first time local Maori have cultivated kumara on the island for a long time, certainly more than a hundred years. As we have a large group from Glenbervie School visiting on the same day Dwane has kindly volunteered to transport the group over and up to the planting site while Emma and Jono do the tour, and Pam organizes the "kapu ti" for after.

The fruit trees are blossoming in the orchard at the Manager's House and the island flax is covered in flowers, much to the apparent delight of the local tui. Our veggie garden is providing strawberries, radishes, rocket, spinach in abundance with courgettes, watermelon, carrots and potatoes on the way. The boys have been cultivating their supermarket promotion Little Gardens and have enjoyed seeing the parsley and broccoli sprouting up and moving them over into the big garden.

## **Kiwi**

Friday 18 October was a big day for kiwi on and off the island as Emma and Todd Hamilton, aided by son Jack Hamilton and Bernie went after several kiwi, to be returned to the mainland out at the Tutukaka Coast. Two kiwi were caught, named Milo (by some of the younger pupils at Glenbervie Primary School) and Ko Marohi (by Room 5 at Ngunguru Primary School), while a third which had proved persistently difficult to track by telemetry over the preceding few days, could not be accessed having holed up in a difficult bit of terrain on the south west side of the island. The kiwi were farewelled at Onerahi with the kind assistance of Freddie Tito, the attendance of several locals and a dancing three-metre bronze whaler in the water just off the yacht club during Freddie's karakia.

The kiwi were taken out to Ngunguru for a visit with a class from Ngunguru Primary School. At 6pm there was a pre-release event at Tawapou Coastal Natives Nursery at Matapouri supported by the Tutukaka Coast Landcare Group, and other Landcare and Kiwi Coast supporters. Several hundred people turned up to see the kiwi and hear the advocacy message from the experts about kiwi survivor-ship, dog and predator control. These releases are always a big deal and a huge amount of work so thanks to everyone involved and in particular to Guy and Sandra Bowden of Tawapou for their hard work on the whenua and opening it up to all comers on a Friday night.

The fecund Glen has been sitting on another nest for the last couple of months over at the ruins. Emma is keeping an eye on the eggs which are expected to hatch soon.

## **Other Fauna**

We have had up to four dotterel chicks at the sand barge/barge landing over the last few weeks, which has necessitated some extra care when undertaking boat work and driving the Polaris in the area. We have gotten to see and hear all the alarms of the parents, 'broken wings', 'broken legs' and lots of squawking as they try to keep us away. We have also seen baby banded rails. The oyster catchers are also nesting in the same area, along with the Caspian terns we mentioned in the last report. The ducks which took up residence several months ago are still regular visitors to the same area. The nesting shorebirds have had to put up with some major tides thanks to the recent Supermoon which, along with the sharp westerly of the last few weeks, has seen the top of the breakwater inundated.



The orange pollen-spotted tui have been abundant around the ranger's residence with visits to the eaves several times a day that we are aware of. We have lived on properties that get regular visits from tui in the past but never this close and this regularly and it's been a real delight to have them only a couple of metres away, showing us their amazing colouring. We haven't figured out what they are up to yet, all suggestions welcomed!

We also had an unintended visit from an unlucky kingfisher, which tried to fly through the reflected trees on our bedroom window one afternoon and managed to stun itself. Emma and the boys made it a safe and quiet place to perch and gave it some sugar water and after about 15 minutes rest and relaxation it took off again.



**Very lucky kingfisher**

Our woolly friend, Lambykins has been weaned and shifted over to the ruins with the rest of the flock, somewhat to the dismay of certain members of the family. We look forward to the summer shearing of Lamby's ovine aunties shortly.

### **Odd Stuff About Old Stuff**

An hour or so of tsunami sirens in the middle of the night and a Correspondence School module on soils and rocks with Charlie has brought home how much our environment, even the bit of it we can't easily see and touch, shapes our world in different ways. As I usually tell the school groups, Matakohe-Limestone Island is one big limestone rock with a thin layer of topsoil on it, but the story isn't quite that simple.

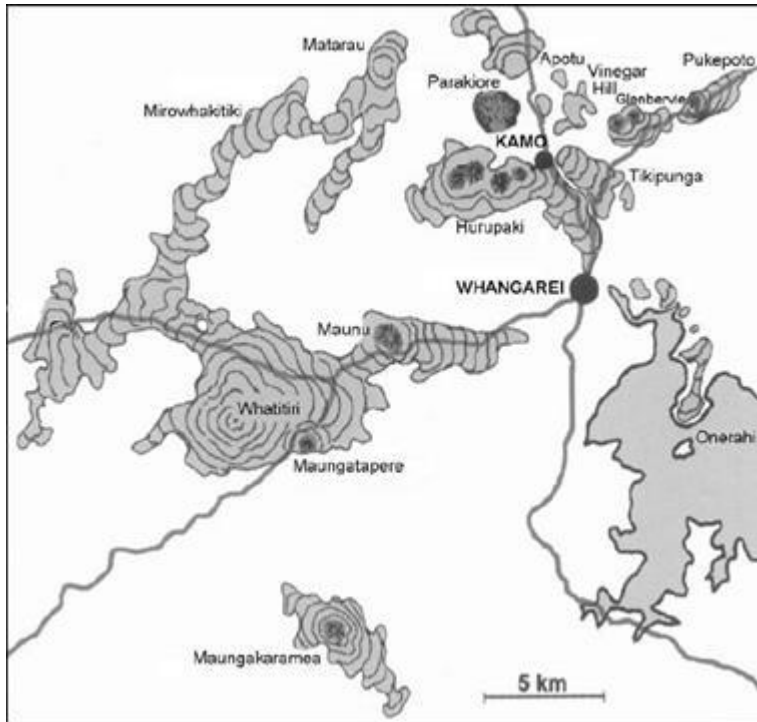
There are two areas of softer, older mud and sandstone on the island, at the summit and on the north western corner in the vicinity of the Edge house. While the pa is on the highest point of the island, its makers must have found it considerably easier to work on the softer, thicker soil up there to create occupation terraces and defensive ditches, not to mention digging the postholes for a strong palisade out, with wooden *ko*. Likewise, the only obvious occupation terraces on the island aside from the pa are on the soft, thick soils that are present around the deeply cut gullies near the Edge house. Here, and below the ski slope are also the thickest and most extensive deposits of shell midden on the island.

Beyond the island, is a harbour and wider landscape shaped by volcanoes, the ancient eroded cones of 20-30 million years ago which form the Hen and Chickens, Bream Head and Manaia, and the main peak of Parihaka. More recent volcanic activity at Vinegar Hill helped form the Tikipunga plateau, and vents on the south east side of Parihaka produced the lava flows which helped form Onerahi around five million years ago. The much more recent cones of Hurupaki, Matarau, Maunu, Maungatapere, and Whatatiri were formed only 500,000 years ago. The lava fields from these volcanoes produced immensely rich volcanic soils across much of Whangarei. Much of the land north of central Whangarei to Kamo and Glenbervie, west to Maunu, and around the other cones beyond was in gardens when Europeans first arrived in the area.

Much of the lava field is now covered in houses, shops and roads. But 800 years ago, a fire pit was laid down in a garden (or perhaps an area of old forest about to be cleared), near what is now the SH1/Kamo Road intersection. That fire pit has provided Whangarei's earliest radiocarbon date yet, testament to how soon these soils were recognised and exploited by the Polynesian ancestors of the Maori. Another early date, from midden at Smugglers Bay, indicates the whole area was in use as a food basket, probably within a hundred years or so of the first arrival of those hardy sailors. In the 1870s the bones of the little swamp moa intermingled with the bones of people, stone tools and hearth stones at Pataua and Ocean Beach.

Later, when the population grew, the rims of the newer cones and the steep and rugged peaks of the older volcanic hills around Whangarei became host to hundreds, if not thousands of kumara storage pits dug to protect the provender of those extensive gardens, and the occupation associated with those pits must have involved thousands of people.

Just imagine...



Map of the late Pliocene and Quaternary Whangarei basalt volcanic field, showing location of scoria cones and lava flows (From B. B. Spörli and B. W. Hayward. 2002. Field trip guides, GSNZ Annual Conference "Northland 2002", Geological Society of NZ Miscellaneous Publication 112B).

**Finally**

Don't forget to mark the date of the next Volunteer Wednesday on 7 December, pickup from the Onerahi Jetty at 0900 as usual.



Proudly supported by; Environmental Northland, Forest Floor Nursery, Harbour Marine Ltd, Marine North Ltd, Northpower, Northland Port Corp, Northland Regional Council, North Tugz, Onerahi Lions, Phoenix Boats, Red Bull Powder Co., Tawapou Nursery.

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