



Welcome to Issue 28 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc.

The mad rush to Christmas is over. We hope you are finding time to relax and enjoy the beauty of nature in all her summer splendour.

It has been a busy year for us — not all has gone smoothly (when does it ever?) — but we end the year satisfied with what has been achieved, and grateful for the bonds of friendship formed as we work together towards a common objective — caring for the land.

Stepping back in time

Awhitu Peninsula Landcare walks are popular fixtures, and we are indebted to the many generous property owners willing to give us access. This Labour Day was no exception with around 150 happy souls making the most of the beautiful long weekend, enjoying a gentle walk over private farmland on the wild west coast. Although the stunning views and fresh air were obvious draw cards, the assembled throng seemed most enthralled by the tales of bygone days given by past and present caretakers of the land.

Hilary Atchinson regaled us with her family history which stretched back to the 1850s and resulted in the land becoming widely known as Irwins Gap, after her antecedents. Life for the early settlers was certainly no picnic — no roads meant that the journey to Waiuku was an arduous one along the west coast shoreline, tide permitting.

A short walk over the neighbouring airstrip

with commentary from Viv Rutherford brought us to the site of Kakarua Pa and the precipitous views of the gully flowing down to the Tasman. We were blessed to be in the presence of George and Karl Flavell from Ngati Te Ata who took us even further back in time with the stories of the lives of their forebears — ruas (pits for storage of food and implements) and defensive ditches were no longer mere depressions in a paddock but tangible links between the tangata whenua and the surrounding landscape.

Awhitu peninsula is incredibly rich in such cultural history. The Flavells are instrumental in the identification, recording and protection of the sites and we heartily thank them for their efforts.

Below: Rua pits came alive for 150 walkers, especially this young gentleman
Below left: George Flavell (left) shows his map of Awhitu pa sites
Below right: Hilary Atchinson shares her family history

A tranquil holiday

We wish you all a tranquil holiday season.

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the Earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of birds, the ebb and flow of tides, the folded bud ready for spring. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after the night and spring after the winter." — Rachel Carson, 'Silent Spring'

A million trees and half a bucket of whitebait!

Landcare members were inspired by a recent trip to Raglan. Well no wonder we hear you say — Raglan is a stunning place to visit.

Yes, indeed it is, but the source of our inspiration was actually a humble Raglan resident called Fred. In his low key way Fred Lichtwark has been successful in transforming the Whaingarua (Raglan) harbour from a polluted waterway to a vibrant fishery, and has been instrumental in replanting much of the surrounding countryside, particularly the catchment areas — restoring biological balance and encouraging the return of native flora and fauna.

In doing so, Fred has surprised even himself at the increase in profits which are being returned to local farmers, many of whom were less than enthusiastic when he first outlined his plans 15 years ago.

Some farmers are reporting an increase in profitability by an unbelievable 40+%. Mike Moss, dairy farmer reports, "We first started fencing off swamps and waterways to prevent costly stock loss. This was very successful and we soon realised there were many other benefits as well."

"There was a noticeable improvement in water quality, there were considerable savings in not trying to drain swamps, and drains that were fenced seldom needed cleaning. We also learnt that a margin around a waterway significantly reduces

the amount of nutrient loss into the water. These areas are now planted in native shrubs and trees, improving the habitat of bird and water life, making the farm more attractive."

In the Whaingarua catchment, more than 40 farmers have now participated by fencing and planting an estimated 450km of riparian areas.

Over one million trees have now been planted. Riparian planting reduces run-off of silt, livestock manure and nutrients from adjacent pastures into streams and harbours and improves water quality. There are also additional benefits for wildlife, landscape values, employment, and recreational/ tourism benefits for the local community.

One tangible example? Whitebait catches have increased from 1/2 cup per day to 1/2 bucket per day!

Fred says: "People are starting to get that it's not just the fuzzy green. It creates employment. It creates wealth, not only to your pocket. It's so rewarding and it's not that difficult. You feel bloody good at the end of the day."

We are hoping to bring Fred to Awhitu next year, to share his common sense approach with those of us who might be interested in learning more about 'feeling bloody good at the end of the day'.

Below: Fred shows Landcare members a vibrant, planted catchment



First Landcare walk for the New Year

Our next field trip is planned for Sunday 27 March over Robert and Kaye Hamilton's farm, by Given Road on the Peninsula.

The Hamiltons have carried out significant pest control and

revegetation on their beautiful farm, with impressive results — unfortunately they report that this winter's plantings are dying due to the long dry.

More details on this great day out will be revealed nearer the time.