



NEWSLETTER

No.1: May, 2005

*Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre
Te Whare Taonga O Ngaa Rohe O Arekahanara (Inc)
798 Franklin Street, Pirongia 2450*

WE'RE UNDER WAY!

It is now 16 months since December, 2003, when the Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre first opened its doors to the public, and nearly a year since the well-attended Official Opening held on 22 May, 2004. This is a good time to take stock and tell members and supporters about what we have been doing.

The opening of the Centre was a significant achievement. Since then, work has continued steadily on gathering and cataloguing historical materials, and on making the steadily growing displays available to members of the public.

This progress towards achieving the aims and objects of the Centre was made possible by the voluntary contributions of a hardworking nucleus of members and a widespread set of organizations and individuals who, as friends of the Centre, donated funding and material resources, historical archives and display materials, and made significant contributions of time and expertise.

The Visitor Centre works in association with the Pirongia Te Aroaro O Kahu Restoration Society which contributes to the displays and also provides personnel to help with opening the centre to the public. Our thanks go to Clare St Pierre.

WE DEPEND UPON OUR VOLUNTEERS

The Historic Visitor Centre is reliant upon volunteers for all its functions. Historical materials are gathered and catalogued voluntarily, displays are designed and assembled by volunteers, volunteers open the centre to the public, and administration, including the all-important quest for grants is undertaken voluntarily. This means that we are totally dependent upon volunteers and that if we are to expand our operations, we need to recruit more people who are willing to spend time working for the Centre.

Until February, 2005, the Centre was open to the public on a regular basis only on Sundays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Our records show that during the year to February, over 700 people visited the centre.

In February, Shirley Scott volunteered to open the Centre every Monday. This has made an important difference.



Volunteers talk with members of a visiting group.

What is needed now is for others to volunteer to open the Centre on yet another day each week.

And while you are there, besides talking with visitors, who include some really interesting people, you will find the opportunity to help with other essential tasks.

Volunteers who regularly open the Visitor Centre to the public include: Marilyn Yeates, Paula McWha, Julie Karsten, Murray and Barbara Walter, Sabina Owen, Sue Scott, Sally Uerata, Patricia Grierson, Shirley Scott, Glenyssa and Alan Hall.

ESTABLISHING THE SITE

Many organizations and individuals played important roles in establishing the former St Saviour's Church building on the present site. They include:

- ✂ Waipa District Council
- ✂ The Corrections Department and the Waikeria Community
- ✂ The Pirongia Ratepayers Association
- ✂ Purekireki Marae, representing iwi.
- ✂ Arnel Joinery
- ✂ Individuals such as Sabina Owen, Ros Empson, Murray Walter, Keith Ormsby and Berwyn Sterling.

FUNDING SUPPORTERS

We are greatly indebted to financial supporters. Significant contributors to date have included:

- ✂ Waipa District Council
- ✂ Trust Waikato
- ✂ The Russell family
- ✂ Sky City
- ✂ Pub Charity
- ✂ TrustPower

President: **Sabina Owen**
550 Kane Street,
Pirongia
Phone 07 871 9992

Secretary: **Julie Karsten**
129B Avalon Drive
Hamilton.

Would you like to help?

If you are interested in possibly assisting as a volunteer, please contact Sabina Owen (Phone 07 871 9992) to talk about how you might help and what might be involved.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOUR

One way of helping volunteers to approach their work with confidence is to increase their knowledge of local history. Last November, the Historic Visitor Centre Executive Committee arranged a day-long tour of local archaeological sites. The tour was led by Owen Wilkes, the DOC archivist in Hamilton who maintains the records of sites throughout the land district. Those who enjoyed the day with Owen were mainly volunteers, members of the executive and some friends. Travelling by bus, the group visited sites including Matakita Pa, Land Wars sites in the Te Rore and Paterangi areas, the Swingletree Museum on the Paterangi Pa site, Waiari Pa, and flour mill sites on Grey Road and Anderson Road. At each site, Owen commented on the archaeological evidence.



DOC archivist, Owen Wilkes, comments on the archaeological evidence at the site of Matakita Pa during the November tour.

Those who took part enjoyed the day and some who had lived in the district for most of their lives were surprised by the wealth of history on their doorsteps.

A further tour is planned for June when the focus will be sites in Pirongia and to the south, along the Puniu River.

The Centre has on display a map showing the main archaeological sites in the district identified by DOC. They include pre-European sites, sites from the Land Wars, and other sites such as mission stations and flour mills.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE

- Back copies of *Footprints of History*, a goldmine of local historical information. (\$5-00/\$5-50 a copy).
- Pirongia Forest Park*, published by Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society. (Price \$4-00.)

FAMILY HISTORY

A number of people with family connections to Pirongia are providing information about the history of their families. Material has been collected locally about the Bell family. In San Diego, Julie Fox is working on the history of the Garmonsways, and in Canada, a granddaughter of the Alexander family is working on her family history.

TWO VOLUNTEERS

When **Paula McWha** returned to the Waipa district in 2003, she and her husband settled in Pirongia. Soon after arriving, Paula volunteered to work at the Visitor Centre every third Sunday. By doing this she expected to learn more about the area, the local people and visitors to the area, expectations which have generally been fulfilled, and she has enjoyed meeting some really interesting people.



Paula says that as a volunteer she can be as involved as much or as little she wishes, which suits her well. At the moment she does not wish to be a committee member but perhaps that might change in the future. In the meantime, she feels very much a part of the team.

Since February, **Shirley Scott** has opened the Centre on Mondays. Shirley is a local painter who is well-known as the organizer of the annual Art Exhibition held in the Memorial Hall every Craft Day, raising funding for the Fire Force.

Shirley dedicates Mondays to her art and since February she has used the Visitor Centre as her studio. She says that it has a wonderful ambience which stimulates her creativity, but that it also puts her in touch with some fascinating members of the public with whom she really enjoys talking.

Clearly, this is a win-win arrangement.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Recently, **Ros Empson** rescued a set of damaged plan drawers from disposal by the Hamilton Museum. They have now been repaired locally and will provide storage for maps and large photographs.

Funding provided by **Pub Charity** has paid for a laminator which is essential for protecting display materials.

RESOURCES & DISPLAYS

A number of organizations and many individuals have contributed to the continuing development of archives and displays. They include:

- Dame Te Ata-i-Rangi-Kahu for the loan of portraits of Maori Kings.
- Te Awamutu Museum for copies of archive materials.
- Roz Liddell of the Te Awamutu I-Site, and the AA for Information and brochures.
- The Department of Conservation for display materials and copies of archaeological archive materials.
- Pirongia Service Station and David Bowler for electronic equipment and display units.
- Kevin Farrell of Pirongia Welding for building the rotary display stand.
- Individuals who have developed archives and contributed displays including Mary Hurst, Marilyn Yeates, Murray Walter and Sabina Owen.

AN INNOVATIVE DISPLAY UNIT



The rotary display stand, pictured above, was designed by Centre stalwart Murray Walter and built by Kevin Farrell of Pirongia Welding. Its multiple panels are being used for a growing number of historical displays. Do you remember the days of the RDX postal delivery? This is documented, as is the history of the Alexandra Racing Club, the Pirongia Domain Board, the annual Craft Day, hotels and river history. Besides being economic in the floor space required, this display unit is also flexible because the panels are easily interchanged.

THANKS

To Peter Druce whose lawn-mowing around the Visitor Centre keeps the property so tidy.