

NEWSLETTER

No. 10, November, 2007



Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre
Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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It's the Touring Season

One way in which the Historic Visitor Centre draws attention to the rich history of our village and district is by running tours of historic and archaeological sites. Initially, we ran tours for our members, particularly those who staff the Centre, and we continue the practice of running new tours for our members before they are offered to the wider public.

On 13 October, we ran our first tour of sites **South of Pirongia**, including Mangatoatoa Pa, the Anglican Church Mission at Manganapouri, the Ormsby Cemetery in Kiwi Road, near where Robert and Pianika Ormsby lived, the Wesleyan Mission and Maori School in Cannon Road, Te Kopua, and Puketotara Pa in Candy Road on the Pukuru side of the Puniu. Along the way, the party was able to see from the bus a number of other sites including Whatiwhatihoe, the locations of the original Turner and Reynolds dwellings, and Turner's flour mill opposite the end of Te Tahi Road. We were fortunate to have on the tour a number of people with interests and knowledge about specific sites.



At the Te Kopua Wesleyan Mission Site

In particular, Ngaire and Ron Phillips and Keith Ormsby drew on lifetimes of recollections. The spectacular view of the area from Puketotara Pa also drew useful comments from Charlie Coles and Barbara and Murray Walter whose property bordering the Puniu includes the site of Whakairoiro Pa and a ford on the Waipa. This tour will be repeated in the future. Don't miss it.

The popular tour of sites **North of Pirongia** was repeated for the fourth time on 17 November. This has become an annual event.



Full participation!

Coming Tours

Two further tours are planned for early 2008.

16 February: Path of War 1. A tour of sites associated with the Waikato War of 1863-4. It will start at the Alexandra Redoubt, Tuakau, and end at Ngaruawahia. This will be a repeat of the successful tour last February which was done in cars.

29 March: Path of War 2. A continuation of sites associated with the Waikato War of 1863-4. The tour will take in Te Rore, Paterangi, Waiari, Rangiaowhia, Hairini, Kihikihi and Orakau. This will be another first-time tour which we will probably do by bus.

If you are interested in taking part in either trip, leave your name at the Centre, or email Alan Hall (a.hall@clear.net.nz) for further information.



Where in the World is Puketotara?

Thanks for support:

Sharkey Howell who demonstrated bone carving and traditional tattoo on Craft Day.

The Krippner Family whose **Bavarian Band** was a drawcard for the Centre on Craft Day.

Marilyn Yeates, Barbara Walter, Robin Astridge, Glenyss Hall and Alan who completed a clean-up of the outside of the Centre prior to Craft Day.

Landowners on the South and North Tours who continue to generously give us access to sites on their properties.

Ruth Clarke who donated church brass and a collection plate used at Waikeria, together with some of her own hand-made cards depicting the church.

Jessica Amoore who is donating to the Visitor Centre from the proceeds of her greeting and Christmas card sales.

Len Styles

We were shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden illness and death of Len Styles in September. Len was a valued and respected friend, member and volunteer who helped with maintenance work and regularly opened the Centre on Mondays. In fact, he had completed his regular duty on the very day he was struck down by illness.

He is remembered for a wide range of contributions to our community and is sadly missed. We share the grief of Margaret and his family.

New Members

A warm welcome to new members ...

- Andrew Lee
- Charlie Coles
- Maurice & Tricia Troup
- Robin Plowright
- Jean Ryan
- Sharon & Boye de Thierry

Barbeque for members.

Thursday, 17 January 2008 at 6:00 pm

Join us at the Pirongia Clydesdales (1375 McClure Street) for a Pirongia Visitor Centre Pot-Luck BBQ.

Bring meat to cook on the BBQ, a dish to contribute to the meal (with appropriate serving tools) and your favourite tipple.

If you are coming, leave a message on the Centre answerphone, or send an email so that we can orchestrate the menu.

Plates, cutlery and glasses, etc. will be provided.

See you there!

In Committee

In September, a kauri tree was planted on the boundary between the Visitor Centre and Section 550 in memory of the late Bruce Russell who was deeply interested in local history and had a family association with Pirongia. Thanks to Elsie Russell who donated the tree.

The Committee soon expects to have the drawings for a planned upgrade of the garage behind the Centre which it hopes to line and equip as a work and storage area. Once the plans are completed, applications will be made for grants to assist with the work.

Plans are under way to begin recording oral histories from long-time residents for storage at the Centre. An ethical process has been devised to protect the interests of those interviewed and will be tested early in 2008.

Ideas are being canvassed for improvements to the signage outside the Centre. The present flag and sandwich board have reached their used-by dates and need to be replaced by new signs which are less cumbersome to carry and put up. The Committee plans to make representation to the next meeting of the Residents and Ratepayers Association which has an interest in the covered notice board. We would like to see the notice board upgraded, possibly displaying a prominent, attached i-sign.

Plans are under way for the installation of sun filter film on the old church windows before the end of the year, using a grant from the New Zealand Community Trust which was acknowledged in the last newsletter.

It is also expected that work to improve access for people with physical disabilities will be completed this year. This involves the installation of ramps in the main building and a grab rail in the toilet. The funding by Trust Waikato was also acknowledged in our last issue.

New and Improved

Have you seen the new display about the Walter Scott Reserve, assembled by Barbara Walter? It contains a spectacular set of coloured photographs of fungi in the reserve, captured by photographer Don Horne of Hamilton. It is well worth a visit.

You will find it on the circular display unit.



Season's Greetings

From the past: The Public Hall

Alexandra had one of the first public halls in the Waikato. It stood in Crozier Street on the present reserve (Section 550) and although it was built in the days of the Armed Constabulary (It opened in 1876) it was built by the community assisted by the gift in 1869 of a disused military building, AC labour to split shingles and £30 by The Minister of Defence and Native Affairs. The remainder of the initial cost of £250 was raised from donations and fundraising events such as a "grand concert" held in the school (now the Playcentre building) by the Alexandra Harmonic Society in January, 1875.

Construction by a contractor began in October 1874, when about £200 had been amassed, about £50 of it in promissory notes. However, shortage of funds meant that progress became a stop-start affair. Nevertheless, by July 1875, the building had been painted and the shell was nearing completion when disaster struck; the building was blown down in a gale. It seems to have lacked sufficient internal bracing.

Not to be deterred, the Public Hall Committee met two nights later and determined to re-erect the unlined building, a process which appears to have been accomplished in relatively short order for the additional cost of £20. This decision seems to have been accompanied by further fund-raising, which culminated on 24 August 1875, with a fund-raising ball to celebrate the opening. The building was described as "large and commodious, being 60 ft by 24 ft, and has been put up at a cost of about £250". It included a stage and a separate supper-room, although initially it was unlined. The building was opened with a debt of £108-4s (including the promissory notes which were effectively loans by members of the Public Hall Committee) but the debt was quite quickly whittled down to £61 by fund-raising events held in the hall itself.

The building became an important centre of community life, accommodating regular concerts, balls and dances, church services and public meetings. For a time in the later 1870s, it also served as the first roller skating rink in the Waikato and was the envy of Hamilton correspondents to the *Waikato Times*.

Eventually, the hall was replaced by the present Memorial Hall in 1921, and the name *Armed Constabulary Hall* was probably used from that time to distinguish between the two halls. The Methodist Church took the building over for church activities until the present Methodist Church was opened in 1958. It seems that the inadequate bracing continued to be a source of problems. Fred Boggis and Ron and Ngaire Phillips both recall that in its latter years the building had wire guy-ropes stabilising it against further wind damage of the kind which occurred in 1875.



The hall shortly before it was demolished. The wire rope stays appear to have been removed.

Visitor statistics

Our visitor numbers fell away understandably during the period when work on the streetscape in front of the Centre was under way. Numbers improved in October, but they remained low compared with the last two years.

However, the number of visitors in November show signs of being better than in any previous year. They were boosted by a number of group visits. December also appears to be shaping well.

Tracing family roots

Descendants of Gilbert Ormsby met at the Centre on Saturday, 13 October. Under the leadership of member Owen Ormsby they are busy documenting the history of their particular branch of the Ormsby family. It was fitting for them to meet in Pirongia.

On the Wagon

On 18 November, as a part of the SCREAM Festival, the Pirongia Tourism Association organized wagon rides with Pirongia Clydesdales which stopped at three artists' studios and the art competition display in the Memorial Hall. The Visitor Centre provided a commentary on the local history. This is a great way to see the village.



All aboard!