

NEWSLETTER

No. 12, May, 2008

Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre
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A Family's Story

The story of the Johnson family was the subject of a presentation by Ngaire Phillips on 22 April, which was enjoyed by more than twenty members and people from the community. The Johnsons may not have come to Mangapiko until 1908, but marriage linked them to descendants of John Daley who was a member of the 2nd Waikato Regiment and lived on Lot 311 in Alexandra township. In the subsequent century, they became deeply involved in the life of the Mangapiko and Alexandra/Pirongia communities.



Ngaire Phillips talks about a draft of 'My Family's Story'.

Ngaire's talk was organized around a Powerpoint display of photographs which recorded the changing life of the community, including changing institutions, transport and farming practices. The pictures remind us that there is a wealth of 20th Century history about the district waiting to be recorded, and that photographs and the memories of older citizens provide obvious starting points.

In the process of telling the Johnsons' story, Ngaire shared many ideas relevant to others interested in investigating their family stories. She left a list of suggestions which she had found helpful. Contact the Centre if you would like a copy.

More recently, Ngaire has advised us that her book is about to be printed. If anyone would like to purchase a copy, they should contact Ngaire (Email: ron.ngaire@xtra.co.nz) before the print run. The cost of a copy will be about \$50.

The Path of War: From Te Rore to Orakau

Twenty-four enthusiastic members and members of the public, led by Robin Astridge and Alan Hall, spent Saturday, 29 April tracing the path of war of the British Army between 27 January and 1 April, 1864. The tour began at the site of General Cameron's encampment at Te Rore, where the dry conditions made it possible to get the bus to a place overlooking the river where supplies were landed.

Views of the sites of Paterangi Pa and the Waiari Engagement followed. Then the by-pass of Paterangi led on to Rangiaowhia where the cemetery of the Catholic Mission, St Paul's Anglican Church and the site of Blewitt's Redoubt were visited. Then it was on to Kihikihi and Orakau.

Feedback suggests that this tour should be repeated next year.



Robin Astridge points out the location of the British picquet on Picquet Hill.

Thanks for support:

Barbara and Murray Walter, assisted by **Charlie Coles** and **Boye de Thierry**, for clearing the garage in preparation for the planned upgrade, sorting the contents and putting some of them into storage.

The de Thierry Family who have agreed to lend a model traditional Maori canoe for display in the Centre.

Sabina Owen who regularly supplies photos for the Newsletter.

Pub Charity for a donation of \$8,000 towards the cost of converting the garage to a storage and work area.

Patricia Grierson, Sabina Owen, Ngaire Phillips, Edna Green, Tina & Gavin Boggis, Audrey Henderson, Peter Hasnip, Min Nolan, Teresa Elliott and Betty Neill, who contributed items to our collections.

Data entry

In our last *Newsletter*, it was reported that Sharon Rayner had been employed to enter data about collections items into a database which will facilitate computer searches. She works on Tuesdays and Thursdays when the Centre is not open, and is making great progress. The acquisitions are being recorded in the order they were received, and she is now entering items from 2006.

Membership renewals

This is the time of year when memberships of the Visitor Centre must be renewed. A form is included with this newsletter. Please include the completed form with your subscription so that our records may be kept up-to-date. Of course, applications from new members will also be most welcome.

Tom Roa to speak at the AGM about Whatiwhatihoe and the Kingitanga.

The AGM is scheduled to be held in the Centre on Tuesday, 24 June, at 7.30 pm.

At 8:00 pm, our speaker will be Tom Roa of Purekireki Marae, who lectures on Maori at the University of Waikato, and is also Chair of Te Kauhanganui O Waikato-Tainui (often called the Tainui Parliament). Tom will talk about the development of the Maori King movement over the 150 years since the coronation of Potatau Te Wherowhero in 1858. His presentation will specifically address the relationship of the Kingitanga with Whatiwhatihoe and Alexandra in the 1880s, as well as its relevance today.

Not to be missed.

Members of the public will be most welcome.

Bring a friend.

The garage conversion

Steps are under way to convert the garage, behind the Historic Visitor Centre into a storage area where artifacts and archival materials may be safely stored, and where new displays may be developed.

At the moment, there is a serious lack of storage space at the Centre. At present, the garage is of limited usefulness because it tends to be damp, its temperature fluctuates a lot and dirt blows in under the roller door.

Plans have been drawn up to install a draft-proof window and doors, line and insulate the building, put down vinyl floor-covering and install storage shelving and work surfaces. A heat-pump will be added to control temperature and humidity.

To date, a grant of \$8,000 has been received from Pub Charity, which will begin the work. Further applications have been made to various charities for a further \$9,000 to complete the alterations. Funding will then be sourced for the heat-pump and other fittings.

Whatiwhatihoe: a panorama.

Recently, the Centre had delivered an enlargement (1000 x 1300 mm) of an early photograph of Whatiwhatihoe in 1884, taken by William Williams from the vicinity of Hanning Road, looking down the Mangauika stream, with Alexandra in the distance. It shows the extent of the Whatiwhatihoe cultivations and many buildings scattered over the site in the heyday of the capital of King Tawhiao when it was the Centre of the Kingitanga.

It is particularly fitting that this picture should be on display for Tom Roa's talk about Whatiwhatihoe and the Kingitanga at the AGM.

The Centre is grateful to the Alexander Turnbull Library for permission to print and display the photograph at no charge.

Family connections

We regularly receive inquiries from the descendants of early settlers of Alexandra, some of which open new avenues of investigation.

A recent inquiry was from Teresa Elliott, a descendant of Lt. Walter William Young, who died and was buried here in 1865. Where he was buried is something of a mystery. Early newspapers show that at least 12 men from the 2nd Waikato Regiment were buried between 1864 and 1867, but there are no cemetery records before 1875. A contemporary newspaper indicates that cemetery trustees were not appointed until 1872 when the present 5 acre reserve was created.

It remains possible that early burials were made in Section 334 which was an earlier reserve at the end of present-day Oak Lane. It is adjacent to the boundary of the present Alexandra Cemetery.

Perhaps the War Graves Commission will be able to help us.

Another eel weir

During the recent period of drought and extremely low flows in the Waipa River, Tony Roxburgh identified the exposed remains of a Maori *pa tuna* or *eel weir* near the true right bank of the river above the Puniu River junction, and close to the site of Whakairoiro Pa. The first photograph is of the remains of the vertical stakes of the weir. Behind them, silting has filled the area between them and the old riverbank. At normal river flow levels, the remains of the weir would not be visible.

Eels formed an important part of the traditional diet of Maori people in this area. Besides being cooked as fresh fish, they were preserved by smoking and drying and stored for both trade and consumption at other times of the year. The Waipa and its tributary streams were known for their rich supply of eels.

It is likely that this eel weir was a single weir structure, erected more-or-less parallel to the river flow, alongside the deepest run through a rapid, where migrating eels were most likely to swim. Such structures are described in *Fishing Methods and Devices of the Maori* by Elsdon Best. When constructed, it would have stood in the river, at the edge of the deeper water. The stakes were probably much taller and driven into the river bed using a *ta* or Maori *maul*. They were braced with one or two horizontal cross members and often strengthened with diagonal supports, all lashed into place using strong and pliable *aka*, including supplejack which was split for the purpose. The fence was effectively wattled with brush woven in and out of the stakes so that the water could get through, but the eels were diverted downstream.

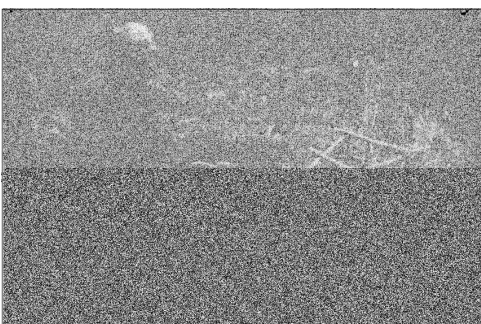
The second photograph is of a model of the framework of such a *pa tuna* which was used by Best to illustrate the significant features of such structures

At the downstream end of the weir was a right-angled frame, attached to two stout posts enclosing the entranceway to a *poha* (circular net funnel) designed to lead the eels into a *hinaki* or eel trap which was emptied regularly.

This suggests that the recently revealed remains of a *pa tuna* were simply the stumps of a much taller and more sophisticated structure which would have been used seasonally in February, March and April when mature eels were migrating to the sea. Each year, the structure would be re-furbished and the interwoven wattling replaced for the new season.



The eel weir remains, photographed by Tony Roxburgh. The line of posts runs parallel to the river flow.



A model illustrating the structure of a single weir with its poha to the right.

Can you help?

Russell Cooney (pictured) is a descendant of W.G. Sim, who worked here as a gardener for Miss Emily Miller and later (around 1820) operated a forge as a blacksmith on Ross Street, in the vicinity of today's Methodist Church. Recently, Russell and Margaret Cooney visited the Centre to show us some photographs



in a family album and ask if we could identify any of the places where they were taken, or the people included in them.

Russell will send us electronic copies of the images which we will display and invite help with identification.

In our library

The recent purchase of some Mary Scott books increases our holding to 34. They are available for borrowing by members. Ask at the desk.

Recently purchased is another family's story: *A Waikato Settler's Legacy: The story of Captain John Campbell Johnstone and his Pioneering Descendants*.

Volunteers wanted

The incoming Executive Committee will review the days when the Centre opens. It would be desirable to open on Saturdays, if more volunteers are available.

If you are willing to help, please let us know. Volunteers who can contribute say one day a month, or even half days, will be most welcome.