



# NEWSLETTER

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Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre  
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## An Evening for Volunteers

The activities of the Historic Visitor Centre are entirely dependent on volunteers who not only staff the centre on four days a week, but also engage in research, develop displays, organise special events and conduct the business side of our operations.

On 24 January, we held the first special occasion for our volunteers – a meeting at the Visitor Centre, followed by a barbecue hosted by Nick and Jill van der Sande at Pirongia Clydesdales.

The meeting at the Centre allowed many of our volunteers to meet as a group and talk about their work and interests. President Sabina Owen introduced Ros Liddell from the Te Awamutu Information Centre who talked to the group.



Volunteers meet at the Centre

Special thanks must go to the van der Sandes for hosting the barbecue which followed. It was something of a celebration and an opportunity for us to metaphorically pat one another on the back and say "Thank you".

## Coming Event: Tracing Family History

Keep the evening of **Tuesday, 17 April** free to take attend a panel discussion on Tracing Family History. Starting at 7:30 pm, the lead speaker will be **Jan McBeth** from the Te Awamutu Genealogy Group who will use a Powerpoint presentation to illustrate how she went about investigating her own family's story, highlighting sources of information. Members **Garry and Karen Howard** are genealogists who will comment and contribute from their experience. Member **Paula McWha**, who runs Creative Memories workshops, will also contribute ideas for recording and presenting the fruits of investigation.

We expect the evening to be of considerable interest to our members and others who are interested in piecing together the stories of their families. But it will also be of benefit to the work of the Centre if it improves our skills for tracking the histories of early residents and helping others to do so.

Other members of the community are invited to attend.

## Visitor Numbers Up

Visitor statistics for the financial year to the end of January were 1719 compared with 1173 at the same stage last year. This represents an increase of 546 over the 2005-6 figures. We have already surpassed the 2005-6 annual total of 1579 and appear to be on track to achieve our target of 2000 by the end of March.

## Spruced Up

Have you noticed how spic and span the building appears? The committee arranged for Len Styles to re-coat some weathered paintwork, particularly the faded green trim and paintwork around the windows. He also water-blasted the ramp and decking and painted the previously unpainted handrails. The result is very pleasing.

## Thanks for recent support to ...

**Paula McWha** who again handled the bookings for the February Archaeological Tour.

**Nick and Ros Empson** for again arranging a delicious lunch for the recent Archaeological Tour, and **Paula McWha, Marilyn Yeates** and **Glenyss Hall** who assisted.

**The New Zealand Community Trust** for a grant which allowed the Centre to purchase a vacuum cleaner.

**Darren & Angela Davis of the Te Awamutu Tile and Carpet Court** for supplying the materials and arranging the tiling of the toilet floor.

**The Russell family** for a further donation to the Centre library fund.

**Patricia Grierson** who donated another copy of *Paterangi Remembers*.

**Barbara and Murray Walter** for cleaning and re-oiling the carved sign.

## Re-enactment

On Saturday, **17 March, between 10.00am and 4:00pm**, the 65<sup>th</sup> Regiment Re-enactment Group from Howick Historic Village will perform at the **Queen's Redoubt, Pokeno**, complete with authentic uniforms and black powder 1860s weaponry.

Don't miss this opportunity to scramble for lollies fired from a mortar!

The event is to publicise the re-construction of the redoubt and to raise funds. The redoubt is on the right as you drive into Pokeno from the Expressway.

## Not to be missed:

The Te Awamutu Museum is currently setting up a new display entitled **NZ Wars – the Waikato Campaign** which is to be officially opened on 9 March. The Museum has many artefacts relevant to the 1863-64 war in the Waikato and this display is to be a permanent one because the events were so significant in the history of the district and the country.

Make a point of visiting to view the display. And tell your friends about it.

## In Committee

The Committee is working on a **long-term concept plan** for the development of the Centre, using the proposal completed last year by Sonia Fimmel.

A coherent set of display topics has been identified and discussions continue about a layout to incorporate them, using Sonia's suggestions.

One matter of immediate interest is the development of compact storage and display stands for our modest but growing library and for tourist brochures, together with a community noticeboard. We have a grant for these projects and you can expect to see changes in the next few months.

The other matter of immediate interest involves repairing some of the timberwork around a few of the church windows and installing sunlight filter film (and/or possibly some blinds) on the windows to reduce damage to displayed materials by strong light. Sunlight control measures are under investigation and an application for funding will follow.

The challenge for the committee in both these projects lies in adopting measures which have a minimal impact on the historic appearance of the building.

Recently, the Pirongia Fire Force, with whom we share Section 1, approached the Centre seeking our approval of plans for a new fire force building which will intrude slightly beyond the existing boundary. The Committee gave qualified approval to the plan seeking assurance that the metal cladding of the proposed building should have a horizontal profile and colour in keeping with the heritage appearance of the surrounding buildings, and that height and appearance of the shared boundary fence should be subject to negotiation.

We understand that account will be taken of our concerns.

## New and Improved

Thanks to the generosity of the NZ Community Trust we have now purchased a **Miele vacuum cleaner** with a HEPA filter suitable for cleaning where artefacts are stored. It also has a very wide range of settings to provide strong suction for floor cleaning and more delicate suction for display surfaces.

Thanks to the generosity of Te Awamutu Tile and Carpet Court, **the tiling of the toilet floor** is now complete. This has improved considerably the appearance of the room and makes cleaning much easier.

## Path of War Tour

On Sunday, 25 February, eight members and friends travelled by car to visit a number of sites associated with the 1863-64 military invasion of the Waikato, following the first half of the so-called *Path of War* from Tuakau to Ngaruawahia.

After meeting at Pokeno, the group visited the Alexandra Redoubt overlooking the lower Waikato near Tuakau. Then it was on to the Queen's Redoubt, Pokeno, where a group of enthusiasts who are currently re-constructing the redoubt were holding their regular working bee. Dr Neville Ritchie, one of the archaeologists leading the project gave a conducted tour of the site, which is not yet generally available to the public, and explained its significance.

From Pokeno, we visited the site of the Eglinton redoubt on the Koheroa ridge where the first engagement of the Waikato War took place. A picnic lunch followed at Mercer where we saw the gun/rifle turret from the gunboat *Pioneer*. Then the group visited the Whanagamarino redoubt, from where the Maori defensive site at Meremere was shelled, and visited Meremere.

Rangariri followed. There the group visited what remains of the Maori defensive position, the site of the military redoubt established after the battle of Rangariri, and the cemetery where many of those who died in the battle were buried. At the tearooms we also viewed a DVD presentation about the battle.

The tour ended at the Point, Ngaruawahia, at the confluence of the Waipa and the Waikato Rivers, near the capital of the Maori King which was occupied by General Cameron's force in December, 1863, and where a second turret from the gunboat *Pioneer* is located.

Those who took part found the tour interesting and informative. Although all had travelled the route many times, none had realised how many important pieces of our historical jigsaw are located along the way.

In the schedule of events for the next financial year we plan a further tour to follow the rest of the Path of War to Orakau. Several members have registered interest in a repeat of this year's tour, but not on a Sunday. That will also be considered for next year's programme.



*No, not the Great Wall of China. It is a reconstructed parapet at the Queen's Redoubt with Dr Neville Ritchie on the left.*

## Archaeological Tour

Our last newsletter signalled our intention to repeat the November tour to cater for people remaining on the waiting list. The tour, again led by Alan Hall, took place on 17 February. The party visited traditional pa sites at Matakītiki and Waiari, the Te Rore and Paterangi sites of British and Maori combatants in 1864, Cowell's flour mill in Grey Road, Whatiwhatiho, Military and Armed Constabulary redoubts in Pirongia and a number of other sites viewed from the bus.

We are grateful to the landowners who gave us access to the various sites, to Alison Hooker of the Swingletree who opened their private museum for the party and also to Ros and Nick Empson who provided lunch in such an appropriate setting.



*At the Te Rore war graves.*

The interest generated by this tour suggests that it will be worth repeating at least annually.

## Don't Forget!

*Tuesday 17 March.  
Tracing Family History.  
7:30 pm at the Centre.  
Visitors welcome.*

## On the Internet

Another internet website about New Zealand history which is worth exploring.

[www.teara.govt.nz](http://www.teara.govt.nz) gives you access to Te Ara (the pathway) Encyclopedia of New Zealand.