



Hokianga Historical Society Inc.

PO Box 26 Opononi 0445

Ph. 09 405 8498

Incorporating
Hokianga Museum

NEWSLETTER – OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2013

I have just been reading previous years' spiels from the same two months and they all start the same way: (1) we have the members' dinner coming up, (2) Grace is in charge and (3) she is pushing me to get it publicised because nobody seems to be coming.

Well, the same thing is happening this year, except this time it's LUNCH, not a dinner. But as usual everyone leaves things to the last minute, so I will repeat:

Our members' lunch this year is on Saturday, 16th November, at 12.30 for 1pm, at the Opononi Hotel. Our speaker is Dr Tony Birch, long-time Rawene Hospital Director (probably not his proper title) now retired but still working away, as doctors do.

Tickets or bookings are available through Grace Wilkinson, ph. 09 405 8665, or through the museum or any other member willing to pass it on. You would win our eternal gratitude if you could do it really early! Paying on the day is allowed, but arrive in good time to do so.

Sadly, we've already had one apology – our Patron, Heather Ayrton; but her reason is anything but sad – she's attending the 150th anniversary of the NZ Herald for which she was a writer (I refuse to use the term 'Stringer') for many years. We have a great many of her articles on file, so I hope they make a fuss of her.

Having mentioned our Patron, I have to tell you that on the 16th October we lost Mrs Ethel Pickering, our previous Patron. She was 92 – a very kind and gracious lady to the end. Many of us attended her tangi at Matua Aronui Marae in Whirinaki.

With summer approaching we have been giving some thought to our holiday programme, and have established two definite dates (i.e. as definite as the weather will allow) for trips on the water. The first will be a **sunset cruise** round the lower harbour; that will be on the evening of Sunday, 29th December, 7 -8 pm, and the cost will be \$20. Hills are always best viewed from the water so for this we will find out stories of the **hills around us** to tell you.

The second water trip will be a repeat of the first only four weeks later, on **Sunday 26th January** 2014, also 7-8 pm. This is Anniversary weekend, a little later in the summer so we will call it a **twilight cruise** instead. Also \$20, and you're allowed to b.y.o. if you want. We found that Pete Clark, our only boat-transport person, is already booked out during most days in January so we've gone for evenings as our best bet.

There are daytime **excursions** being planned as well. Instead of looking at hills it was suggested we climb one as well, so with permission from the Ambler family we hope to somehow get to the top of the large hill on the Ambler land, Piwakawaka – mostly for the view from the top which is described as

FANTASTIC. There is no date fixed for this yet but it will be in the first part of January, perhaps the 8th, and more definite details will be in the pre-Christmas newsletter.

Other less strenuous **guided walks** – to the Koutu boulders, round the South Head - will be arranged for during January as well. You'll notice we're trying to catch the tourist trade while it's available, but members will still be first choice.

By that time the Tourism Assn. will have completed production of the updated and enlarged edition of **Hokianga Walks** which Jackie and Lloyd Walker first produced about ten years ago. The HTA has now taken it up and obtained funding for a fresh edition, so for months Lloyd and Jackie have been working on the update, adding new and lesser-known walks, trying each walk themselves, checking and double-checking every detail, drawing new maps. Now they have almost reached their deadline and I'm sure their relief will be heart-felt when it's finally in the hands of the printer.

Talking of publications, we have formed a committee to gather material covering Hokianga's experience of World War 1 and after, but it's going to be a long haul! If anyone else is interested in taking part, please let me know as the more contributing, the better.

Now for what's been going on in Hokianga.

First, the Opo saga. Actually, it is almost all over bar a tidy-up of finances and, from our point of view, the completion of the Opo story to go round the interpretation rail of our Opo's plinth. The unveiling of the bronze replica Opo took place on an initially wet and very windy Saturday morning in September, with a big crowd including TV3. Many speeches, many photographs, and a good lunch.

A second occasion of note involving unveiling was **DoC's launch of the interpretation plinths** they have installed at the edge of the Araiteuru reserve. The history of Hokianga's south headland is told and illustrated on four man-sized standing columns (vandal-proof, it's hoped) on a platform set above the car-park, so that before you actually go into the reserve you can find out something of its significance. The stories are well-told and the illustrations very beautiful, really worth a visit in themselves. So the launch took place on October 12th, the last day of the school holidays, before a satisfactorily large crowd and with a formal lunch at the Pakanae Marae. By this weekend (time of writing Labour Day) there have been many viewings and they still remain unscathed.

Just before that took place, we held the last of our "Sunday Afternoons in the Museum" when **Stephen King talked on the Kauri of the Waipoua Forest.** He arrived with his car loaded with maps, posters, samples and a DVD of photographs, then launched in and we were still going at 4pm. His theme was really that although Die Back is the most recent and best publicised threat to Kauri wellbeing, the kauri has always been vulnerable to a whole range of long-term human carelessness, possum depredation, and ground pests. Rescue to be successful has to be drastic on every front, not just one at a time. So ideally, you keep people out of its vicinity altogether, but when it is such a tourist attraction, how to do this? It's a challenge for everyone.

All our "Sunday afternoons" have been pleasantly successful, with really good local speakers attracting a comfortable crowd (the museum only has twenty-three chairs so if you're late, you stand and the word 'comfortable' ceases to apply) The only problem is, we tend to forget to mention the gold coin donation in time. But hey, it's still good publicity.

The final piece is about **the Kokohuia Road statue** mentioned in the previous newsletter. Its existence was quite a surprise to most people since unless you live up at the top, or are visiting someone there, or simply exploring, you don't have much reason to go up that high. It's a no-exit road and doesn't have much of a turning circle at the end. However, the newsletter must have reached the

owner of the statue somehow, because a little while after, an envelope was delivered to the museum and this is what was in it –

Saint Francis in Kokohuia Road, Omapere

In the middle of a paddock at the end and right hand side (when driving up) of Kokohuia Road, Omapere, there is a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi kneeling on a big stone. The left arm of Saint Francis is stretched out having a bird sitting on his hand. This refers to the event, when Saint Francis talked to the birds. With his right hand, Saint Francis holds a wolf. This refers to the event, when Saint Francis admonished a wolf not to terrorise the surrounding villages and farms.

*The statue was made by a German sculptress, **Agnes Mann**, who lived from 1907 until 1994. She was Catholic and most of her works were made for the Catholic Church in Germany. Besides that, several of her works were made for the Lutheran Church in Norway, where she spent part of her time. Her work consist of three categories: sculptures like the one in Omapere (she made more than one Saint Francis), coloured glass windows for churches and designs of the space round the altar in churches, partly done with pebble stones in mosaic technique. In her long life she was one of the well-known and searched-for contemporary German artists in the field of art for churches. The author of these lines has known her personally and well.*

The statue is about 30 years old and previously had been positioned in the Austrian Alps. The statue is made of bronze and was cast in Germany's oldest bell foundry, Petit & Gebrüder Edelbrock GmbH & Co, having been established in the 17th century (1690) The weight of the statue is about 330 kg. It is anchored in the stone below and was placed on that stone in a complicated procedure by Richard Hogan of Opononi with his digger, about three years ago. The stone is from South Hokianga and was brought to the paddock.

The author of these lines and his wife living in Opononi own this land in Kokohuia Road and plan to build a resort type of guesthouse on it with the name of Saint Francis, whenever the necessary funds for this salutary project have been achieved. Sponsors are welcome.

Dr Klaus Contag

Telephone 09 4058076

E-mail: conwa(at)mx.com

This was worth sharing with everyone, I thought. It's a complete background to the statue, and it also shows how little one knows about one's neighbours. (I had never met him) I have heard since that the intention behind the guesthouse is to provide a retreat for cancer-sufferers as he and his wife are both doctors. That's to be confirmed, though the site would be an ideal one.

I had thought to use the remaining space for photographs from all the events, but after struggling for three hours to persuade this ***** computer to insert the right ones from the various files, or even to let me look at some of the folders of them, I am giving up. It obviously needs a very good spring-clean from someone who knows what they are doing. I've managed one though, newly scanned from Dr Contag's envelope – it hasn't had a chance to get scrambled.

Next time, maybe.

Alexa.

