

Gorge Gazette

News about Trelissick Park, the Ngaio Gorge and Streams

(Footbridges over the stream are numbered from 1 – 6 going downstream, excluding the old bridge off the side of Wightwick's Field).

APRIL 2010

Any exponents of rain dancing? The forecasts often say "rain" but all we ever get is ineffectual sprinkle. Wanted: a steady 50 - 100 mm.

Department of Conservation (DoC) Community Conservation Funded Planting Forges Ahead

According to one of the perverse laws governing human activity, it has not rained because in March we planted the streamside shelf on railway land below bridge 5. Volunteer Wellington were offering "corporates" from AIG Insurance (see photo) and ACC. Early for planting, but how could we say "no"? By good fortune, the shelf lies under a slope, so the ground was moist. The 700 plants are still looking good. The area will probably fit at another 400, which are being planted in more leisurely fashion.

The planting is in three elongated zones parallel to the stream, containing mainly the following species:

- Stream-side - toetoe, cabbage tree, koromiko, karamu for bank protection and stream shading
- Middle - flax and toetoe (because these get dense and crowd out other species, so it is better to have them together)
- Rear - kohuhu, kanuka, manuka, lemonwood

And so the battle has begun. The erstwhile blackberry is reluctant to depart. Rabbits discovered the karamu, cabbage tree and koromiko. Wandering willie, bindweed and ivy are appearing. Hand-watering seemed prudent in dry areas.

So it is restoration with "spice" - a peaceful area by the stream, with a small patch of bush in-between, where one can work overseen by the occasional fantail or kereru.

The "Flood Plain" Make-over

Just down from the debris trap the stream takes a wide sweep and over time has built up a wide, sandy plain - weed infested and prone to flooding. Marilyn Hester has taken on the restoration, weeding with characteristic energy. Bill Hester, Joe Girasol and Gottfried Theiler have pitched in with mulch moving. Carolyn Theiler has provided wise counsel. The idea is to clothe the area in mainly grasses, sedges and rushes, with also some toetoe and flax.

The Ngaio School Propagation Hut

The Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GW) Community Environmental Leadership Award money has now been donated to the Ngaio School, who are aiming to build a propagation hut. The children will design the hut, built from recycled materials, then a tradesman will do some of the construction. This should fit in well with their arboretum and other environmental projects. Much of the planting by bridges 2 to 5 was done a few years ago by Ngaio School, so it's good to keep up the connection.



Archeological Treasure Unearthed during Youth Environment Forum Visit

Peter Reimann has just delivered his talk to the Youth Environment Forum, at the stream by the debris trap. As for last year, the focus was on the stream, in an urban environment - interferences and mitigations. Then the group did some water sampling, comparing results with those taken at the headwaters. At the moment, the water is in wonderful condition. But the stream has a chequered history of pollution, sedimentation and flooding.

The highlight of the morning occurred during the visit to the "flood plain" restoration downstream. Here one of the group unearthed an old sickle. "Good heavens! That's mine!" said Peter. He had lost it 5 years ago to his chagrin, because the balance and orientation of the blade relative to the handle were perfect. The wood on the handle was pretty rotten, but the steel was in remarkably good shape. It is now restored, almost to its former glory, with a new handle, made from a branch of a home-grown flowering cherry tree, as illustrated.



More Progress

- The two Ontrack picnic tables with seat benches by the magazine building, made from old railway sleepers, are already in use by the local populace. These must be quite unique amongst the picnic tables of the world and are much "in-keeping" with the ambience of the lower valley. They are sure to last for several centuries.
- Gabions to protect the eroding foundations for bridges 4 and 5 were built "in-situ" by a WCC contractor in March (while the ACC team were planting nearby). Loading 8 m³ of rocks manually from the stream bed into the wire cages was an impressive performance.
- More dead willows across the stream have been cut away. There was potential for these to cause blockage and stream bank erosion during flood flows. One had fallen across a sewer line being refurbished below Waikowhai Street and the contractor used a helicopter to remove it for mulching by Trelissick Crescent. The sight of a large tree whisked airborne with such ease.....
- During March a southerly storm roared through with a blast that knocked down 3 of the wonderful forest remnant trees across the track below Ngaio Gorge Road. These had to be cleared by chain-saw by the WCC tree team. Counting the rings on one, it was at least 100 years old.
- To complete the list, Capacity have removed silt from above the debris trap, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Group and WCC has been signed and a health and safety assessment walk-through completed.

Many thanks to Wellington City Council (WCC) Ranger, Joby Mills, for expeditiously following up these jobs.

The Sprayers Make their Mark

People walking through the park will notice that more wandering willie (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) and Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) have been sprayed on the steep hillside upstream of bridge 6 under the GW/WCC funded spraying programme for Key Native Ecosystems. These were major infestations. A few years ago, much of the ground cover from one end of the valley floor to the other was wandering willie. Now there is hardly any. Patches in less accessible areas higher up will be targeted in the next couple of years. But in a classic case of "two steps forward and one step back" a follow-up spraying session in the upper valley resulted in some significant by-kill of our plantings.

Track from Oban Street

A track leading down to the lower valley from Oban Street has long been on our wish-list. This would give people from Wadestown and Highland Park much better access for those living some distance from the

Hanover Street entrance. The route is straightforward, but a bridge over the stream would be expensive. Our Projects Coordinator, David Grace is investigating.

People

We will be sad to lose one of our stalwarts, Carolyn Theiler, who is about to move to Auckland. Carolyn was becoming a fount of botanical knowledge, with her nursery propagations and experimentation. She ranged all over the park, weeding and planting, often with kindred spirit, Marilyn Hester. Thank you Carolyn for all your hard work, enthusiasm and inspiration.

The Sathya Sai Service Organisation visited their spot again below the debris trap for weeding last year's plantings. These are faring remarkably well, despite the dry conditions.

A small group of St Benedict's school children and parents helped with planting at our March working bee below Hanover Street. The planting included some hinau (*Elaeocarpus dentatus*) and a few dozen kohekohe (*Disoxylum spectabile*) propagated by Carolyn Theiler. Kohekohe is notable for its flowers and later seed capsules emanating in a "spray" from the trunk. There are plenty of kohekohe in Khandallah Park and Huntleigh Park, but Trelissick Park does not seem to be similarly blessed. After a couple of weeks, Peter Reimann grew anxious about the lack of rain, so mounted rescue missions on two occasions with a pack laden with his collection of used Schweppes tonic bottles - handy for water storage (after imbibing). The ground under the canopy was bone dry, but the plants looked fine.

Blown Eggs Work

To avoid the chore of periodically replacing eggs in the mustelid traps, Marilyn Hester kindly blew out the contents of each egg, by drilling a pinhole in each end. We have subsequently caught rats and hedgehogs with these. Now we just need a stoat to prove they are similarly indiscriminating.

Shining Splenwort, or huruhuru whenua (*Asplenium Oblongifolium*)



This attractive fern is distinctive for its very glossy, bright green fronds (slightly paler underneath). It is common in Trelissick Park. "The short stout rhizome often forms a hard and woody rounded mass above the ground, the top of which is covered with brown, shiny scales".⁽¹⁾ The fronds are 12 - 100 cm long by 15 - 35 cm wide, "leaflets pointed with fine teeth. The brown herringbone pattern on the underneath of mature fronds is distinctive".⁽²⁾ It is native only to New Zealand. It is hardy and grows best in part-shade on the forest floor or on old logs and cliffs. We planted about 190 last year, funded by the Honda Treefund and GW's Take Care fund.

Water Pepper

Marilyn Hester has found a new weed after the sewer renewal work off Waikowhai Street, identified as water pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper*). Bill Hester subsequently found more in sandy stream areas in the lower valley.



Photo: Bill Hester

Quoting from <http://www.lifestyleblock.co.nz/weeds/article/517-water-pepper-and-willow-weed.html>:

"Water pepper grows in lowland areas in both Islands in NZ, where it is generally found on lake margins, drains, and poorly-drained areas of pasture and grows up to 75cm high. It has noticeable red stems and bright green, lance shaped leaves about 12cm long and with wavy margins. The pink or rose bud-shaped flowers are carried at the end of each stalk in spike-like racemes which curve downwards. In New Zealand it blooms from about November to June. It is thought to have originated in Eurasia, but is now found in many countries.

In pasture it can be found near seldom-used gateways where damp ground is occasionally churned by animal feet, and also where the ground dips and remains moist for longer periods. Roots are shallow and the plants are relatively easy to pull out.

Its name derives from its partiality to damp soil and the sharp peppery taste of leaves and stems. At the base of each leaf is a membranous sheath surrounding the stem.

Livestock tend to avoid it, and it is regarded as poisonous in countries such as the US, Australia and Europe. However the leaves are reputedly used by Japanese cooks to add a peppery taste without masking other delicate flavours. The tiny dark brown or black seeds can be favoured by waterfowl and other grain eating birds."

The Hesters have removed most of this by hand, but Bill thinks it will remain as yet another weed to add to the Trelissick Park legacy.

References

1. Muriel E Fisher. Gardening with New Zealand Ferns.
2. Andrew Crowe. Which Native Fern?

Contacts

Chairman & Adopt-a-Spot: Peter Reimann (04) 938 9602, peter.reimann@paradise.net.nz

Working bees: Dorothy Douglass (04) 472 8558

Wellington City Council (reporting slips and fallen trees across tracks, other problems): (04) 499 4444

Greater Wellington pollution hotline: 0800 496 734

Website: www.trelissickpark.org.nz

Working Bees - Check with Peter before coming – changes may occur (Dorothy will be away)

Sunday 2 May, 1.30 PM Ngaio Gorge Road

Tuesday 11 May, 9.30 AM Trelissick Crescent

The Gorge Gazette

Compiled by Peter Reimann about every 4 months - all contributions and suggestions gratefully received.

Come and participate in the transformation of Trelissick Park or give us your ideas – all welcome. Thanks to all who contributed.