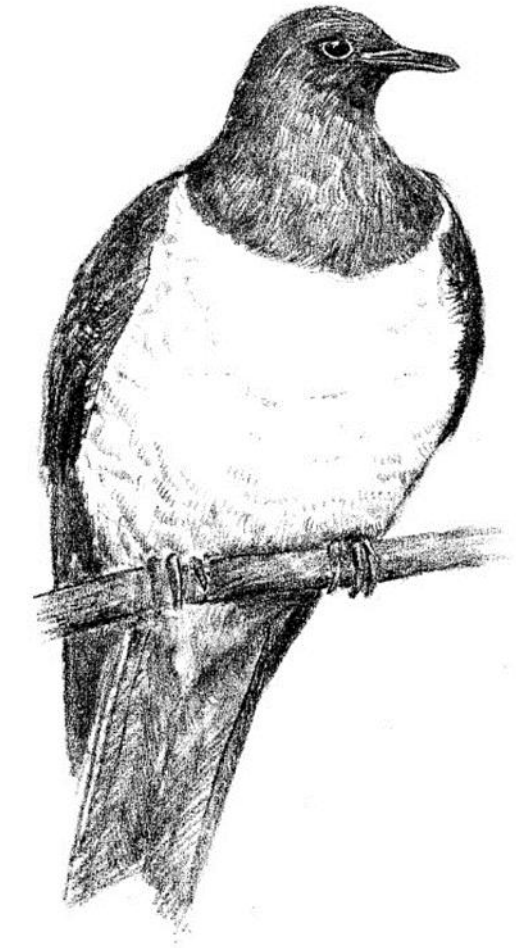

Otatara Landcare Group

# PIGEON POST

*Newsletter of the Otatara Landcare Group*

**Issue 74 Summer 2026**

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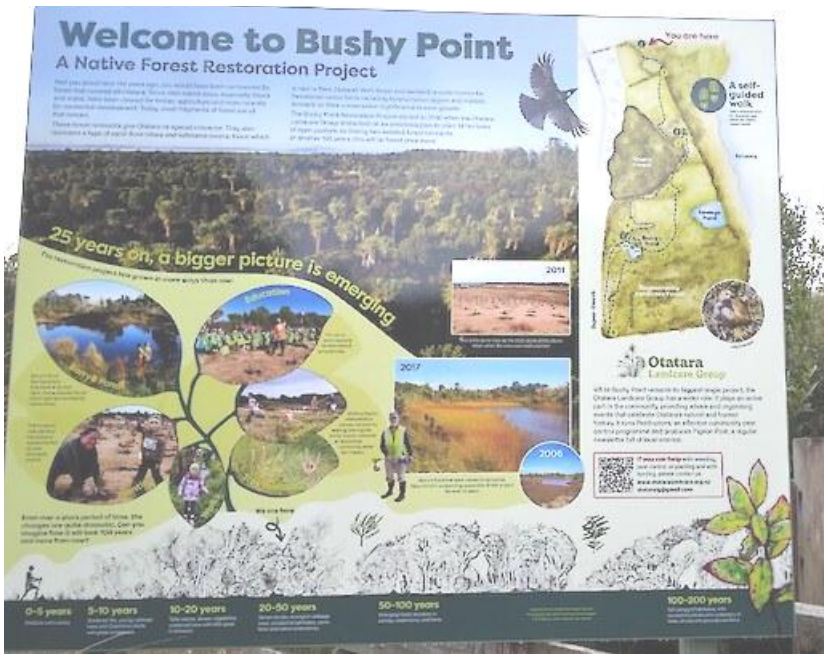
*The full colour version of this publication is available on www.otataralandcare.org.nz under 'publications'.*




## *Eyecatching new sign at Bushy Point*

*Next time you walk into Bushy Point, stop and enjoy this stunning new sign, placed in time for the 25th Anniversary celebrations of the Otatara Landcare Group and the Bushy Point restoration project.*

*It tells the story of how much has been achieved in those 25 years, and includes remarkable 'before and after' drone photos by Jason Hosking.*

*The new sign was designed by Helen Stewart and Cathy Macfie and made by Creation Signs.*

# TURNING 25 WITH A PARTY

## By Chris Rance

On Saturday 18th October 2025, the Otatara Landcare Group celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Group and its flagship project, the Bushy Point Restoration Project.

The spring weather provided its challenges for organisation but we managed to fit the planting and tree releasing morning between days of southerly winds, rain and hail. The planting morning itself was amazingly beautiful. However, as a contingency we had organised the BBQ to be in the Education Centre at the Rance's Southland Community Nursery, just a short walk through from the Bushy Point project.

The Friday before, all the plants and combiguards had been put out on site from the Southland Community Nursery by volunteers of the Landcare Group and the Nursery.

The BBQ, supplied by GWD Russells, was brought to the Nursery and the portaloo delivered to the planting site by the Invercargill City Council. The Otatara School had also come that day to plant 100 kahikatea and pokaka plants under Bronwyn Graham's supervision. These plants were put into gaps within the shelter of the established plantings near the pond.

The new entrance interpretation sign was put in place that week by Creation Signs. The entrance sign has been redesigned by Helen Stewart and Cathy Macfie to reflect the 25 year journey, recognise Barry Smith's contribution and show some stunning 'before and after' drone photos by Jason Hosking.

On the Planting Day, Chris Rance and Cathy MacFie met over 60 people at the gate, Geoff Dembo gave an introduction (Chair Richard had broken his ankle the week before!) and Barry Smith gave the H&S talk and the plan for the day.

Then we were off - planting, tree releasing, starting up the monster BBQ ('womaned' by Linda Jackson, Cathy Macfie and Sally Duston) and in quick time it was done followed by a walk over to the pond – renamed 'Barrys Pond' in recognition of the work Barry Smith has done over the 25 years.

Brian Rance gave a talk on the restoration and Barry gave a demonstration of how the mulcher mower cuts through the gorse between the plants in the 'plantation' area.

They also recognised the Laidlaw family who had come for the day, at the Barry's Pond sign and seat for Maymee and Kevin Laidlaw. Kevin was our All Black Legend from the 2011 Living Legends Project. The BBQ was cranking and sausages were ready when we all walked through to the Nursery.

John McCarroll from DOC gave a short speech acknowledging the Landcare Group and the 25 year project and Brian Rance acknowledged

*Left, Jenna Owen-Eales from GWD and her nephew Hadlee. Hadlee took on the essential job of hammering in the bamboo stakes, as shown by the mallet in his hand!*

the funders, in particular Environment Southland's Environmental Enhancement Fund and also their support.

Then the cakes – beautifully decorated by Linda (OLG) and Dani (DOC) - were cut by the 'originals' – the five members of the committee who have been there since the beginning – Barry Smith, Lloyd Esler, Cathy Macfie and Brian and Chris Rance.

Thanks to everyone who came and made it a very memorable occasion and to Barry for the lion's share of the organising.

*Top right, Barry with some of Kevin Laidlaw's family.*

*Right, Clayton Bragg from GWD and his two children, getting into planting.*

*Below right, DOC's John McCarroll and daughter Caylee in action.*

*Below, the team 'womaning' the BBQ - from left, Linda Jackson, Cathy Macfie and Sally Duston.*

# WELL DESERVED!

## By Chris Rance

At the start of 2025, Barry Smith officially 'retired' from the Bushy Point Caretaker role after 24 years at the helm.

The Otatara Landcare Group committee decided that a fitting recognition would be to rename the Bushy Point pond 'Barry's Pond' and also recognise his contribution in a formal way by updating the Interpretation Panel at the Bryson Road entrance to reflect his influence.

This was all done in secret with Cathy Macfie, Helen Stewart and Chris Rance working behind the scenes to get it all done by the 25th Anniversary Celebration of Bushy Point and the OLG on 18th October 2025.

Barry is not one for a 'fuss' and he doesn't go looking for recognition but the group thought it appropriate to celebrate his contribution. On the Anniversary day, he didn't say much when we announced 'Barrys Pond' - he got back onto his beloved mulcher mower "to kill a few more gorse bushes".

Barry has since 'un-retired' himself and is back but hopefully with more help from us all!!

*Left, Barry demonstrating how the mulcher mower cuts through the gorse between the plants in the 'plantation' area. Below, Barry's Pond.*

# DIGGING FOR THE FUTURE

## By Bronwyn Graham

Mānuka class at Otatara School got to plant kahikatea, pokaka and makomako native trees alongside Otatara Landcare Group (OLG) members to celebrate 25 years of restoration at Bushy Point by this amazing community group.

The thrill of following the tracks to find the next native tree to plant added a great dimension to the event with students and teachers enjoying this.

The privilege of planting these special canopy species was not lost on the group - the class learnt something of the history of this restoration site, and the planting quality was high.

Big thanks to Barry, Brian, Gordon, Sally and Alastair of the OLG for supporting the school with this event. The school congratulates the OLG for 25 years of planting at this site.

When you and your whanau are next out exploring, go and discover Bushy Point (via the Bryson Road entrance - there's a new sign here showing great before and after pictures of this site), check out the restoration project at www.otataralandcare.org.nz/bushy-point-restoration to get involved, or join the OLG through the form on page 23 of Pigeon Post.

*Bronwyn is the environmental education specialist at Otatara School and a member of the OLG committee.*

*Above, from left, Boston Webb, Tiāre Johnstone, Caesar Thompson and Sawyer Brodie.*

*Left, Tiāre Johnstone getting to grips with planting a pokaka.*

# STANDING UP IN STORMS

## News from the Southland Community Nursery

The Nursery is in full swing after the wet and cold spring weather. The most recent event was getting all the plants out for the Bushy Point Planting day in October.

Amazingly the Nursery was untouched by the recent storm event. The native plants we grow are natural to Southland and we stand them out in the wind from the beginning, so they might be a bit hardier than most.

We also specialise in those foundation species that are a natural windbreak for the less hardy natives that are planted later. I'm guessing that the storm damage to big shelter trees will make people think about what they want to plant for the future.

We have always felt that planting macrocarpa and eucalypt for shelter was a mistake. They need annual pruning and we have recently seen what happens when they get too big. They make good firewood blocks, but not good shelterbelts.

We have in the past advocated for wide, diverse shelterbelts of natives which add to biodiversity, feed and shelter native birds and look attractive while also providing shelter.

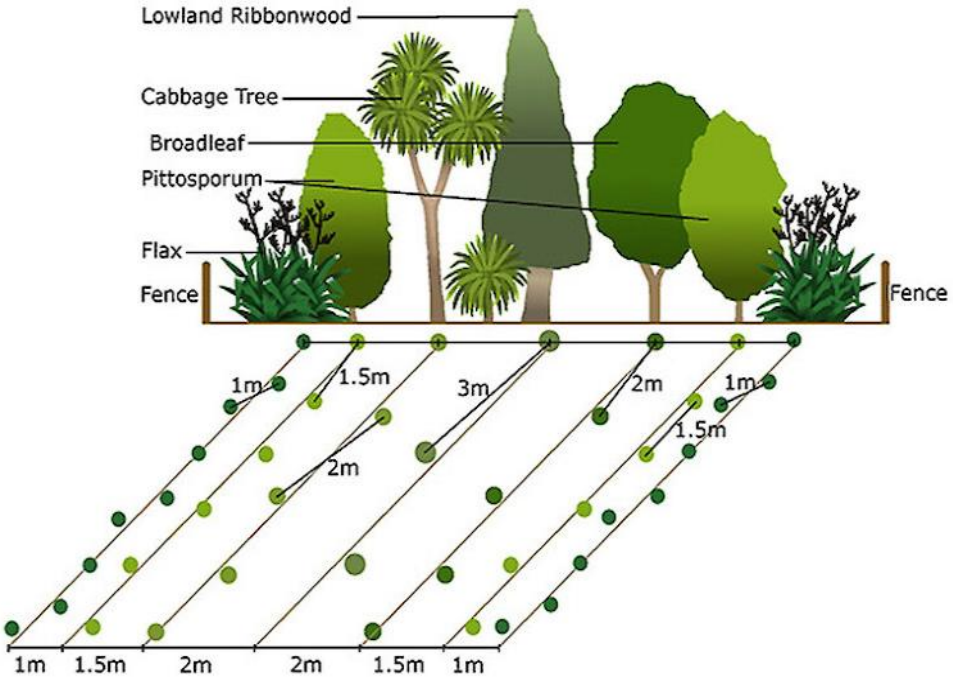
Start with flax, it provides quick robust shelter while also feeding tui and bellbirds with its nectar. Avoid single rows of any species unless you want to hedge it. Multiple species adds to an attractive diverse border which is also shelter – some ideas and species at *www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/restoring-your-patch/planning-your-project/shelterbelts/*

Our orchard behind predominantly low growing native shelter did not suffer at all in the recent wind event.

Maybe we were just extra lucky but our bush held up well, as did our native shelterbelts, orchard and gardens. The macrocarpas on our boundary, that we didn't plant, were another story!

You can get Nursery News throughout the year at: *www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/news-and-events/* including the various events we hold and for any advice, email: *rances@southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz*

Chris and Brian Rance



Native Shelterbelt Profile

# THREE BITTERN...

## And definitely shy! Bitterns seen in Bushy Point

Bittern are a very secretive and rare native bird found in wetlands. In Southland, Waituna Wetlands and Tiwai Peninsula are prime bittern habitat, but even there they have declined. They are occasionally spotted in other places around Southland.

Last year the OLG and Southland Community Nursery hosted Wendy Ambury from the Love Bittern Project for a talk and then a field trip on the searching for and recording of sightings of bitter. The story is at: *www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/news-and-events/the-great-matuku-muster-november-2024/*

On that night, overlooking New River Estuary, we didn't hear any bittern booming but in November this year, Nate Chandrakumar (who had been on the bittern training night) was doing the Bushy Point pest lines and spotted three bittern which flew off as he entered the estuary. That's a very exciting sighting for us as bittern are rarely seen in Southland outside of Waituna.

When we welcomed Wendy last year, we had asked Barry Smith to mow a bittern into our paddock. That bittern could be seen from the Stewart Island plane!

And since then to continue the bittern theme a bittern has now turned up in our new pond paddock. I told Lloyd Esler and he very excitedly asked "how often do you see it?" "Every day" I replied, at which he realised I was talking about our new two metre high steel sculpture! This bittern was made by Cole at Southern Rustic Art in Otatara - *www.southernrusticart.co.nz*

To find out all about the Australasian bittern go to: *www.lovebittern.com*

*Chris Rance*

A warm welcome to Liv Cochrane (left), who offered to look after the social media for the Otatara Landcare Group. Liv is a very well-known songwriter, musician, recording artist, radio presenter, producer, actor, event MC, innovator and motivator (to name just a few) all whilst being a busy hands-on mum! She and fiancé Neil moved to Otatara recently and Liv is loving getting to know their bush block, learning the trees and discovering what a treasure Otatara is! Liv has set up a facebook page for the OLG and has already put up posts. "Over the coming months we'll be showing just how epic our community is, and what exactly it is we all do," she says." Look up, like and follow!

## Matters of life and death

I have written so many stories about seemingly remarkable connections that have occurred between us and different birds but until now have left out what we are regularly experiencing with so many of the birds we care for: the end of their lives.

The intention of 'rehabbers' is to save lives but just as importantly to me is honouring those lives and listening to what the birds see happening for themselves.

For kereru at least I sense that if they have spent much time on the ground bruised and/or disabled in some way, they have little chance of food or good protection against predators and feel like they are dying.

It takes a day or two of being fed nutritious food and being safe for it to slowly dawn on them that they may still have a lifeline. You can see the light come back in their eyes.

When we started, our task felt like it was to nurse and enable birds to recover from their injuries so that they could be released back into the wild.

If and when one died we were pretty sad that it didn't make it. It may not have recovered its ability to fly and be the bird it had been but maybe it might 'make it.'

And then one day I held a tui who had been brought in by a mum and her little girl. The child was sad that the bird couldn't fly or sing and hoped that it would get better.

It didn't want to drink or eat or sit in the cage when it fell over but rested peacefully in my hands. So I held it, walked around the garden listening to the evensong and saw its head tilt to listen too, its eyes open to look every now and then, before it looked up at me and smiled off to wherever a wee bird goes to when it dies.

The child loved the story of the tui dying with a smile, and the photo I sent her. She thought that it was happy and must have felt safe. 'Out of the mouths of little children…'

*The tui that Kathy writes about—peaceful, loved, safe and cared for until its quiet passing.*

A doctor friend said to me years ago that death was seen as a failure to so many in his profession and that bothered him because we would all go through this experience and he didn't want to think of the end of his life and others as failures.

We play a part in the deaths of hundreds of beautiful, vibrant, broken, traumatised, peaceful, frightened and calm birds. And most of those deaths are via euthanasia, which means we hand the bird in its box to the vet team hoping it will prove to be viable on further examination but equally aware that it may not be.

It is odd to wonder if we should be saying 'good luck' to a bird before we leave or 'goodbye' just in case it is the last time we will see it alive. But what I have come to say is 'thank you' because whatever decisions are made, we, and I hope they too, have been enriched.

I see each bird as a gift to our understanding of life: dying for those who are unable to continue life as a free flying bird being at least as important as the physical healing and release of others. We can be tearful, inspired, peaceful, gut-

Continued on next page

ted and a whole range of feelings but the main feeling that has been growing over time is that we are actually privileged.

On behalf of Bush Haven, we would like to extend our sadness and love to wonderful Otatara bird carers Suzi and Brent who have recently suffered the deaths of their son Jeremy and their horse Missy.

*"Who when they left the bush grew quiet*
*But not as empty as before*
*For in their flight they'd left a blessing*
*Soft as feathers on the floor"*

Kathy Morrison

# Wind storm hammered the golf course

Otatara's SBS Bank Invercargill Golf Club faced a dramatic challenge in late October as strong winds swept through the area, causing widespread damage across the course on the eve of two major events the club was hosting - the New Zealand Amateur Golf Championship, one of the country's premier golfing events, and the Club's 125th Anniversary Golf Tournament.

Around 20 large trees were blown over, and many branches were scattered across the fairways. Holes 3 and 10 were particularly affected, where large trees had fallen and rendered the holes unplayable.

The storm also caused damage to Club facilities. The clubhouse suffered damage to its spouting, covers were torn off a storage shed, and a power outage left the Club without electricity for an entire day, adding to the disruption caused by the extreme weather.

Despite the severity of the storm, the Club's team of more than 20 volunteers, working alongside staff, acted swiftly over the following three days to restore the course to the high standard required for the New Zealand Amateur Golf Championship.

They worked tirelessly to clear fallen trees and branches, repair damaged areas, and make the course safe and playable again. The storm also forced the postponement of the Club's 125th Anniversary Golf Tournament.

The milestone event, which was set to celebrate more than a century of golfing history, had to be delayed as the golf course was closed due to the scale of the damage and safety concerns.

After the incredible cleanup efforts of Greens staff and volunteers, the golf course was presented superbly for the New Zealand Amateur Championship. Visiting players and tournament officials expressed their gratitude and praise to the Club for the hard work done to prepare the course and host the event.

Whilst the cleanup will continue for some time yet, SBS Bank Invercargill Golf Club has shown that even in the face of severe weather, the spirit of the golfing community and dedication of its staff and volunteers can overcome even challenges as big as the October 23 storm event.

*Scott Riordan*
*PGA Golf Professional*
*Invercargill Golf Club*

*Below, not many trees left on No 10 fairway.*

# THE BIG BLOW OF '25

## Ecologist Brian Rance's reflections and advice

Hopefully everyone has now recovered from the impacts of the 'big blow' of 23rd October 2025. Many long-term residents of Southland have identified this storm as having the strongest winds they can remember. It is likely that this storm will go down in Southland history similar to the Floods of 1984 and 1986 and the Big Freeze of 1996 as notable climatic events.

Different areas of Southland would have different exposure and wind strength and so suffered variable impacts. Shortly after the storm I drove out to Progress Valley and to Mataura. I have since driven to Te Anau, Kaka Point and Dunedin, so have obtained a feel for the impacts around parts of our region.

I have observed many felled trees and also broken and fallen tree limbs. Shelter belts were most effected and not larger exotic forest or bush blocks. Generally, individual trees, and sometimes two or three adjacent trees fell and only rarely were there whole rows that came down.

What of the effects in Otatara? You will all have your own observations and stories. However, in general, parts of Otatara that I have viewed seem to have escaped fairly lightly.

One area in the wider Otatara area where whole shelter rows were felled was along Bay Road. Also, a stand of gum plantation along Curran Road had many trees down. Both of these areas are flat, low lying and very wet. The trees were likely shallow rooted and it is thought that the saturated ground may have contributed to the high number of trees falling.

As for Chris and my property, we escaped lightly. We have a range of different plantings. Around our home, garden, shelter and woodland areas, we largely escaped damage, with only a few small branches broken or fallen. These plantings are relatively wide (often 20m or more) and they are still relatively young (all less than 30 years) and not too tall (generally less than 10m). These factors probably help to explain the limited damage. We have also a row of tall, oldish (probably 50+ years) macrocarpas, in a paddock along a boundary. These trees are 25+m tall. They fared better than I feared! There was only one large stem, one large branch and a couple of smaller branches that fell. Fortunately, these did not cause too much damage – to our neighbour's property!

The most impacted area in Otatara that I have heard of was the Otatara Golf Club, where several trees came down. Some of these trees may have been more exposed following recent clearance of tall shelter plants along the exposed western boundary.

Bush areas in Otatara and Sandy Point appear to not have been heavily impacted, though there will be areas that are more impacted. Our own bush covenant largely escaped damage, with only a few branches down.

However, along my Bushy Point pest lines the manuka forest on the low-lying wet areas behind New River Estuary was more heavily impacted, with many old, live and dead standing manuka trees coming down. There was much clearing needed along these pest lines.

One of the most impacted places in Southland was Queens Park in Invercargill. This cherished park has lost many trees through the storm and because of concern about their future stability. It will now be changed from how we remembered it from before the storm. Several other ICC parks have also been impacted.

Around other parts of Southland, the trees that were most effected appeared to be large old macrocarpa, pines and gum trees. However, these are also the most common shelter trees in Southland. Some poplar shelter plantings were also affected, often with broken stems rather than fallen trees. Shelter belts that have been hedged or trimmed/topped appeared to escape major damage. Native shelter plantings

Continued overpage

# The Big Blow Continued

*A very large macrocarpa that went down in the wind storm. Photo courtesy PowerNet.*

appeared little impacted; however, these trees are generally less than 10m tall. I have seen a couple of areas where almost all the trees in a shelter row of gums fell.

One of these was on low lying wet ground, with a ditch along the exposed westerly side, which probably compromised the root system. There were also a couple of pine shelter belts on exposed hillslopes where most trees had fallen.

I have seen only one pine plantation with heavy damage. This was a pine stand near Gorge Road, which had previously been partially cleared. It is likely that the previous tree clearance impacted the stability of the stand. I have also seen recently planted forest stands where many trees were leaning over—the forest managers think these trees will recover.

Fortunately, I did not observe major impacts to buildings. Southland was very fortunate to have no loss of life from the storm.

From what I observed and as an ecologist I have a few comments to make on the effects of the wind storm.

☐ Bush and larger planting areas (including forestry) generally appeared little impacted.

☐ In Otatara, fallen trees and branches often occurred in shelter belts, along driveways and around the edge of clearings. These edge sites all have increased exposure.

☐ Clearing of trees on the edges of clearings may expose other adjacent trees to increased future damage.

☐ Native trees that appear more vulnerable are: kamahi, old trees appear prone to having branches break; pokaka, large trees are often hollow and some have rotted sections, so may have increased vulnerability; and manuka, especially if tall, old or over mature and/or particularly in saturated areas.

☐ It is important to have shelter to protect buildings and gardens. However, it is important that these are appropriate for the location. I recommend a wide shelter belt of mixed native species (where possible). This will result in a habitat strip that provides shelter and biodiversity values and complements our abundant native bush areas. Native trees do not grow as tall as some common exotic shelter trees (such as pines, macrocarpas and gums) and so are not as vulnerable.

☐ I now have an increased awareness of wind exposure and the potential impacts of severe wind storms.

☐ It is likely that we will see more storms of this intensity in future because of climate change impacts.

☐ It is important to stay away from forest areas and shelter belts in high wind events. Best to sit tight in a safe place until the wind reduces to a safe level.

☐ I will be looking to reduce the height of our macrocarpas to reduce the risk of future damage!

*Brian Rance, Grant Road*

# UPDATES

## Exploring Oreti Totara Dune Forest

**Oreti Totara Dune Forest walk**
**Wednesday 17th December, 7:30 pm**
This walk will take about an hour and is suitable for families. As this forest belongs to the Native Forest Restoration Trust NO DOGS ARE ALLOWED.

There is one walk that I haven't done in this area that goes past the 'Giant Manuka Jungle'. From there we will continue on to have a look at how this year's planting is going and maybe spend a few minutes stomping the weeds down before we pass Jack's hut and then, depending on the weather, return via the main track, or, if it is a reasonable day we will head down the Western Ramble with its views over the Oreti River and Sandy Point. If you have never been here before you get a totally different view of Sandy Point.

So, bring your family, bring your mother, bring the postie, bring your 2nd cousin visiting from Australia, Hong Kong, Beijing, Manilla, Los Angeles, Area 51, Honolulu, Borneo, Italy, Zimbabwe, London or Montreal (or anywhere else for that matter).

No need to book - Just turn up!

*Contact Barry Smith: bjsrdms@gmail.com or 027 22 88 980*

## Removing Chilean flame creeper in Bowman's Bush

**When: Thursday 22nd January, 7-8:30 pm.**
**Where: Bowman's Bush (meet on Spence Ave, access via Paterson Reserve)**
**What: Pulling out Chilean flame-creeper, an invasive weed.** This is done annually to keep Bowman's Bush from being smothered. QEII would like to thank the key supporters of Bowman's Bush - diligent local residents and Otatara Landcare Group volunteers for their weeding help for nearly two decades, Otatara Pestbusters for their predator control and Invercargill City Council for maintaining the walking track.
What to bring: Practical clothes for working in the bush off the track, gloves can be helpful. No tools or herbicide necessary.
*For more information contact: Jesse Bythell, QEII National Trust Regional Representative (jbythell@qeii.org.nz, 020 400 32109).*

## Tree releasing at Bushy Point

**Tuesday evenings tree releasing at Bushy Point, from 27th January 2026.**
**6–7pm**
Can you help?
Strong spring grass growth this year is putting real pressure on many of the young trees, released from lupins earlier this year, which now urgently need releasing from encroaching grass if they are to survive and prosper this year.

Otatara Landcare Group is organising tree releasing sessions at Bushy Point on Tuesday evenings starting on 27 th January 2026 from 6pm to 7pm, weather permitting. Various methods can be used to release the trees and suppress competing grass and weed growth, as will be demonstrated at the time. If you can help, please meet at the lookout seat, accessed from the Continued overpage

# Bushy Point tree releasing Continued

Bryson Rd entrance to Bushy Point. Children can help too, finding and marking the seedlings hidden in the tall grass! If possible, please bring:

☐ Shoes or gumboots suitable for working in long grass.
☐ Gardening gloves.
☐ Clothing suitable for the expected weather conditions.
☐ A face mask if you are allergic to dust or grass seeds.
☐ Safety (or other) glasses to protect eyes when weeding amid tall grass.
☐ Secateurs and/or a small pruning saw for working in bracken/lupins.
☐ Ideally, a pair of sharp garden shears suitable for cutting grass.
☐ Something to drink, especially in hot conditions.

Look forward to seeing you whenever you can make it!

*Right, your help is needed to release young trees from the grip of encroaching grass.*

# Thank you Team Hannah, James and Bridget!

**This issue of Pigeon Post is generously sponsored by Team Hannah, James and Bridget from Ray White Real Estate, to whom the Otatara Landcare Group is very grateful. It is most encouraging when community-minded businesspeople are willing to invest in supporting the protection and enhancement of our precious environment here in Otatara.**

**Give James, Hannah or Bridget a call if you need an appraisal or to discuss issues around buying and selling or renting in Otatara.**

**Below, from left, Hannah, James and Bridget.**

# OTATARA PESTBUSTERS NEWS

## Financial support for backyard trapping in Otatara

Otatara Pestbusters can now offer Otatara residents nationally tried and proven rat traps complete with a pet proof trap box for only $15, thanks to being selected by the Predator Free NZ Trust (PFNZ), who along with the Simplicity Foundation, are heavily subsidising trapping equipment in selected communities.

In selecting the Otatara Landcare Group/Otatara Pestbusters, PFNZ recognises that native bush and wildlife are a source of pride for Otatara residents. It is also mindful of the past 25 years of volunteer pest control effort led and managed by the Otatara Landcare Group in reserves and the complementary efforts of many residents on their own properties, mainly through the use of bait stations. However, we could do more on the backyard trapping front!

By supplying $35 worth of kit for $15, funding from PFNZ/ Simplicity Foundation has removed the cost barrier to trapping so more people can participate – particularly families and individuals in their own backyards. Remember too, you don't need bush for rats – they are equally at home in shrubbery and shelterbelts. And believe me, just because you aren't seeing them, doesn't mean you haven't got them. What's more, rats are quite partial to wiring and insulation as well as wildlife!

By installing traps in gardens, Otatara can help close the gaps between parks and reserves. Backyard trapping is now taking a front seat to complement reserve trapping. It's a natural evolution of decades of community effort, and ensures the bush and wildlife remain a source of pride.

Contact Otatara Pestbusters Coordinator Dallas Bradley on 021 784962, 213 0234 or amberg2@gmail.com with your trap order and advice on how best to deploy them. And of course, we are still selling bait and bait stations in case you're worried we are not!

## A call for volunteer pest controllers

If you're keen to help out with animal pest control in various Otatara reserves, the Otatara Landcare Group would like to hear from you.

We are calling for 'Registrations of Interest' so we have a list of people to call upon when vacancies arise, rather than having to scramble around and find replacements. Within the Otatara Reserve, several smaller reserves managed by the ICC and the DoC reserves at Bushy Point, Otatara South and elsewhere, there is a wide variety of pest control lines. Some are short, some long, some are off trail and require a reasonable degree of fitness but many are along some form of track and easily negotiable, family-friendly even.

Generally pest control lines need to be checked fortnightly, sometimes more frequently, sometimes less depending on the level of pest activity and time of the year. Pest lines include a mixture of traps and bait stations.

If you would like to help keep animal pest numbers low and sustain the birds and bush, please email us at otataralg@gmail.com.

# Trialling the latest in 'Smart Traps'

When the Bluff Hill/Motupohue Environment Trust (BHMET) offered to loan the OLG an AT520AI trap to trial early this year, we leapt at the opportunity. We are very grateful to BHMET for the offer.

The AT 520AI traps photograph and identify trap visitors, fire if the visitor is a target species, reset themselves, and send the data via a specific communications network back to a base, in our case, the BHMET base in Bluff. The trap also comes with a solar panel to recharge the battery.

Getting good comms back to Bluff from Otatara was a bit of an issue so a 'relay' was installed at Sandy Point to overcome the problem. The site also needed to be sufficiently sunny for the solar panel.

In the end we went for a site on the high banks of the Oreti River which gave us excellent comms and recharging capabilities. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the trap has only caught three mice in five months to date. Hopefully that's because past pest control in the area has reduced pest numbers to a very low level in the area where the trap is located.

A big advantage of this type of trap is it requires less visitation by volunteers to check on its ongoing operation, particularly where access to the site is relatively remote or difficult to access.

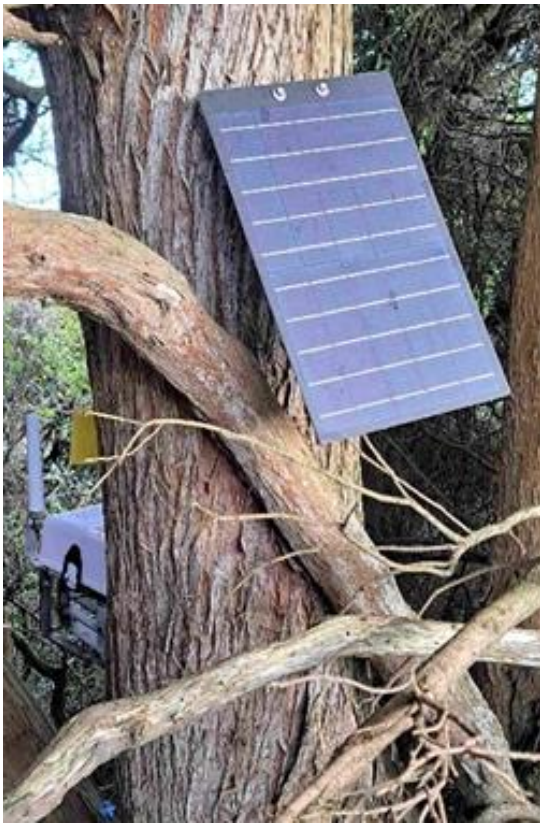
Neither of these factors is too big an issue in Otatara but anything to make life easier for the volunteers that that attend to the trap networks is appreciated.

However, the traps are not exactly cheap at over $1000 each so we won't be rushing in to purchase one unless the trial shows some pronounced advantages over existing devices.

*By Dallas Bradley*

*Below left, the AT520AI Smart Trap in position.*

*Below right, the solar panel that charges the battery.*



# TRIED ORIENTEERING YET?

## Sally Duston writes about this all-age sport at Bushy Point

Have you ever been orienteering on your back door step? Bushy Point is the perfect place for beginner orienteers to start, with its safe boundaries (so children can't lose their parents, sorry kids!), gentle hills and little tracks through the trees – where you can potentially lose your parents, temporarily of course!

If you enjoy maps and a good mental challenge, it's worth coming along to one of our Dash events there which typically have two easy courses of differing length and difficulty.

Orienteering is a map-reading sport, compasses not being required until you reach a much higher level of experience. Navigation is by orientating your map so that it 'fits' the lie of the land, then identifying various features and 'reading' your way to the next spot, marked by a circle on the map.

These are called 'control sites' where you will find (if you are at the right area) a stake, flag and, these days, an electronic gadget with a number. With the use of radio controls, e-sticks, monitors, laptops and tablets, the whole experience is state of the art!

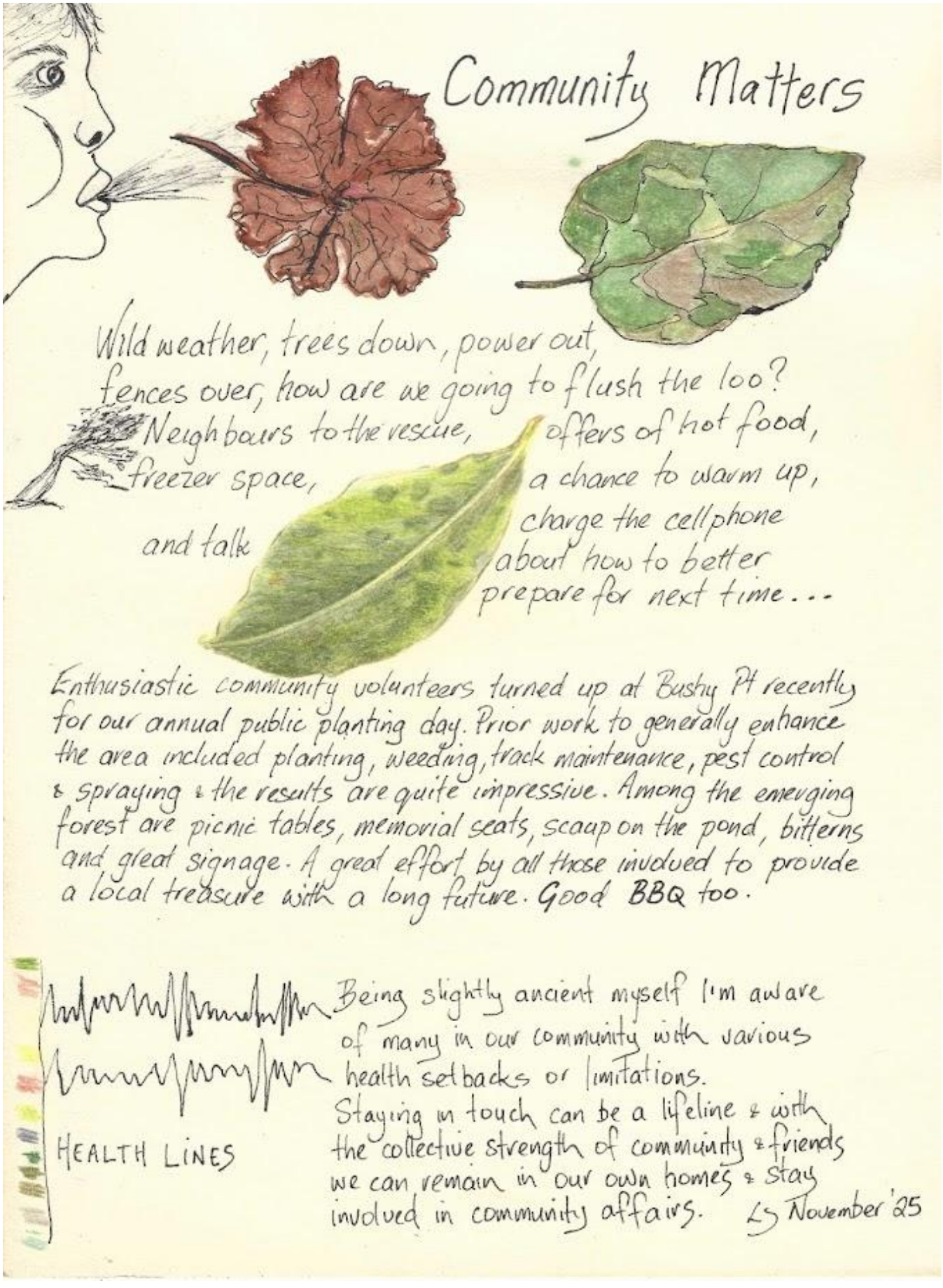
IT failures, don't despair, this is for the organisers to handle! You just get to run/walk/alone/with the dog/with your mates, as the mood takes you – you can be as competitive as you like. And it's a great family sport too.

By the time you read this, Southland Orienteering Club will have introduced students from Hedgehope School to orienteering at Bushy Point and, although another event isn't planned there for this year, we are looking at setting a fixed course for the summer to help you explore and enjoy this gem on your doorstep. Keep an eye out on our website:
*www.southlandorienteeringclub.co.nz*
or the Otatara Community Notice Board later in December for details.

*Below, a control site. Right, a young orienteer making his way through the course at Bushy Point.*

# STRONGER TOGETHER

By Linda



# OUR PROTECTED BUSH

## Caring for our nationally significant remnant forest

There are three special forest types in Otatara (and Sandy Point) – the totara on sand dunes and plains, kahikatea swamp forest on moist organic soils and mixed podocarp forest with matai, totara, kahikatea, rimu and pokaka in intermediate sites.

The bush in Otatara is one of the main reasons that we retain healthy native bird populations. It is great that we still have high numbers of tui, bellbird, kereru and even rare kaka, fernbirds and kakariki.

Otatara and its bush are special. It is not just locally or regionally significant, it is nationally significant. That means that totara forest on sand dunes is so rare now in New Zealand that it has been specially recognised as nationally important.

That is why there are rules relating to the clearing of native bush in Otatara and most landowners with bush have some restrictions on its clearance.

Once, the whole of Otatara was completely bush covered. Looking at an aerial photograph now you can see the fragmented nature of the forest mostly due to development for farming and housing.

As the forest gets more fragmented it becomes more vulnerable to edge effects including wind and weed invasion. Animal pests are another major threat – possums eating canopy vegetation every night do countless damage and the more you control them the healthier the forest will become.

You may view the rules relating to native bush as being unnecessarily strict but they are there for a reason and in most cases if you have a good reason for wanting a tree removed the Council will weigh up the pros and cons and come to a reasoned decision.

The Otatara Landcare Group can help with advice in these circumstances. Generally, the OLG will advocate for retaining and enhancing the bush – in fact the wholesale destruction of bush for development prior to the 1990s was one of the reasons the OLG was formed.

There can be compromises and development can be done sensitively to protect as much native bush as possible. The days of subdividing full bush sections to chop down half of it to build in are long gone.

Part of the special character of Otatara is the remaining forest and we are fortunate to still have our bush areas. Thankfully, most people who buy houses in Otatara with associated bush appreciate the very special place they have bought and want to enhance those values. The OLG can help with that.

*Brian Rance*

*Below, the beautiful native forest in the Otatara Scenic Reserve*

## Resources to help with caring for your bush

The Invercargill City Council has an online document on regulations surrounding properties in Oatara. The preamble states: 'The Otatara Zone differs from elsewhere in the city. The rural-residential lifestyle, a high degree of privacy, scenic values and feelings of remoteness contribute to its uniqueness. It is therefore important that these features are maintained and protected'.

The document includes information on the biodiversity within Otatara, and regulations and guides for what can and cannot be done.

The document can found on the ICC website, *icc.govt.nz,* and search for '*Otatara Zones 2020'*.

The Otatara Landcare Group has some excellent information on its website, *'www.otataralandcare.org.nz'* under 'publications'.

There you will find 'Natural Otatara', which has sketches and a list of all the native plants that occur in the Otatara area.

Also available from the City Council is 'Bushcare', a very helpful and comprehensive guide to the species of native trees and plants found here and looking after and enhancing the forest in Otatara and Sandy Point.

## Bushy Point Pest lines – can you help?

For those who walk around Bushy Point you will probably have noticed tracks going into the bush areas marked with yellow triangles. These are pest lines and they cover the 80 hectares of land surrounding and south of the restoration (planting) area. A dedicated group of volunteers (up to six people) service the rat bait stations and possum and stoat traps, every two to three weeks. They have done this since 2007!

On each line (which are 100 metres apart), there are 'pied piper' rat bait stations every 50 metres, 'flipping timmy' possum traps every 100 metres and DOC 150 stoat traps at less regular intervals and on the estuary edge. These pest lines help to maintain the important fernbird populations and forest birds. The pest lines are not a walk in the park, they can be hard work – the totara block is very up and down, the other lines within regenerating kahikatea forest are constantly wet and gumboots are needed most of the year.

With the big storm small trees have come down over lines and every year the pest line tracks need vegetation trimming back so the pest trappers can more easily service the traps. If you can help with this trimming work we would appreciate it. We can supply hand tools, 'cut and paste' gell and yellow triangles, and it can be done at your convenience whenever you are free.

Email Chris on rances@southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz or otataralg@gmail.com if you can help with this job over the summer months.

## Jo Ogier lino printing workshop

Over the weekend of November 8-9, Jo Ogier came from Christchurch to tutor another workshop in the Community Nursery Education Centre. Jo's work is concerned with issues of conservation, ecology and the role each of us can have in nurturing, protecting and preserving our fragile world.

The full story about the weekend and a fundraising raffle for an beautiful A2 size painting of a A2 size karearea/falcon is at:
www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/news-and-events/another-super-jo-ogier-art-workshop/

# DEAD AND BURIED...

## Lloyd Esler's working on a new book!

'Dead and Buried in Southland' is the title of a book I'm doing on strange deaths, shipwrecks, dead elephants, interesting monuments and so on.

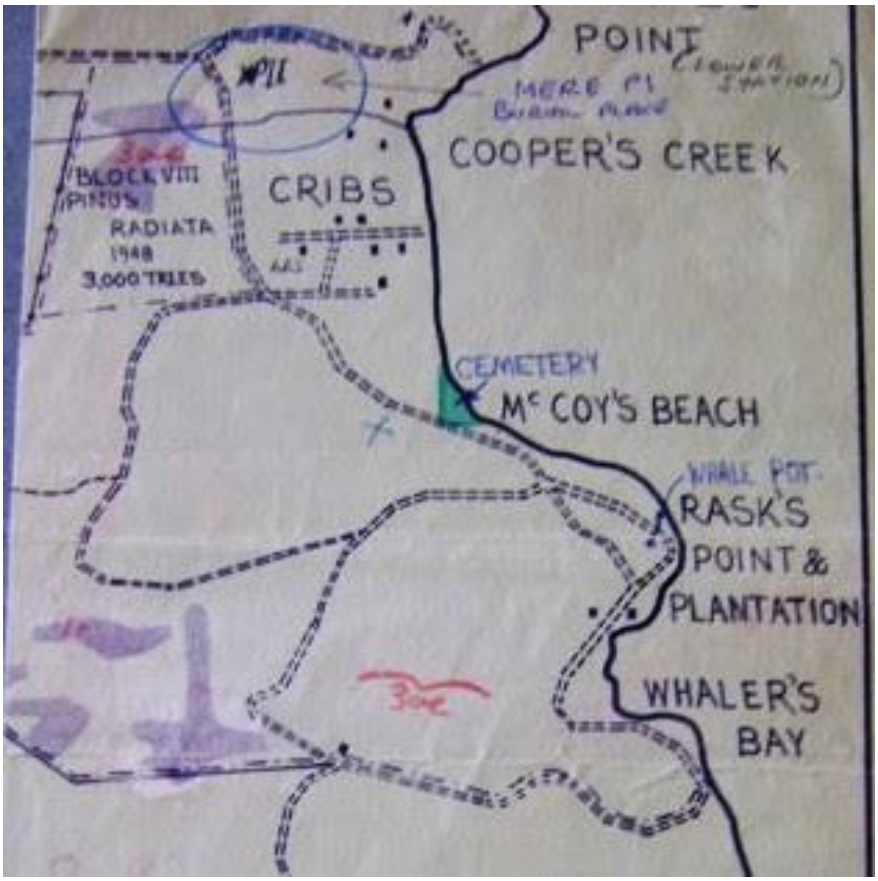
About once a year someone discovers what they believe to be a grave in Otatara Bush but it's the altar for the long-abandoned bush chapel which was part of the Girl Guide camp.

There are genuine burials around, however, dating from early times before cemeteries were established. There was a marked grave on Sandy Point which became part of the pine plantation but with the felling of the pines the site was lost.

Mary Pii, wife of Lewis Akers, is buried there somewhere, with more than one possible gravesite. One is in the vicinity of the Southland Sand and Gravel works which was on the opposite side of the river to her house. Another is about the carpark at Hatch's Hill.

A tiny cemetery reserve, seen on this early map *(below)* is adjacent to the Coopers Creek settlement and may have started as the urupa for Oue Village which was in the vicinity. There are no obvious graves there as burials often had no markers, or the wooden cross that one stood there has long since vanished.

*Above, the altar in the Otatara bush.*




I would be grateful for any interesting stories about lonely graves in Otatara and Sandy Point, or elsewhere. The book is due to come out next year.

On the dead elephant topic, three are buried in Southland and a fourth washed up at Doughboy Bay – a circus animal that died on a voyage, was cast overboard and bobbed around like a cork for a bit.

One is buried in Riversdale, one at Riverton and one under the Salvation Army in Victoria Avenue. Here is a fifth one I came

Continued overpage

# Lloyd's new book and a myth about flax continued

across recently, a bit closer to home… ST 17.1.1930 "During the course of a year many strange things are cast up on the Oreti beach but probably the strangest of all flotsam came ashore last weekend in the form of a dead elephant—not a sea elephant, but a genuine elephant, with trunk and all.

"The carcase was lying on the sands in the vicinity of the wreck of the old Hindoo, and a local fisherman who saw the elephant states that it probably formed part of a travelling circus, and taking ill at sea, was shot, and dumped overboard. The tide has since reclaimed the carcase."

*The Pa Harekeke in Lloyd's garden.*

## Can flax flowering predict the weather?

A good flax year? There is a bit of dodgy folklore that a good flax flowering is an indication of a good summer to follow, but my observations over the years suggest there is no link.

The factors that control the weather are different from those that induce flowering.

The statistics for flax flowers on my property are: 2008/9 – 99; 2009/10 – 1; 2010/11 – 101, 2011/12 – 9, 2012/13 – 29, 2013/14 – 125, 2014/15 – 8; 2015/16 150; 2016/2017 – 28; 2017/18 – 5; 2018/19 – 331; 2019/20 – 8; 2020/21 – 38; 2021/22 – 66; 2022/23 – 60; 2023/24 – 84; 2024/25 – 12.

This shows a range from one to 331 and these figures seem to reflect the Southland-wide situation. The only thing you can say is that a good flowering year is followed by a poor one as the fans die after flowering and it takes several years for the new fans to mature.

There is obviously another factor as well. Perhaps if the temperature hits a trigger level in March or April it will induce flowering or maybe if the temperature falls below a certain level, flowering will be suppressed. You may remember the great flowering of November 2018. Nectar-feeding birds had a great time but did it tough the next summer.

I have a Pa Harakeke, which is a flax garden. There are about 20 forms which you might like to harvest for weaving and older bushes can be prised apart with a crowbar if you want to take a specimen to grow.

*Lloyd Esler 03 2130404*
*or lloydesler@outlook.com*

# LET'S SAVE LIVES

## We need more AED (defibrillators) 24/7 in Otatara

Defibrillators are the (relatively) new medical device that are saving lives. It seems like every event you go to these days has one or is very close to where there is one.

There are about 120 within the Invercargill city area plus units associated with events like Parkrun, and even here in Otatara and Sandy Point there are nine of them. Of those nine, only three are available 24/7 and of those three there is only the one at the school that is in Otatara itself.

The other two are at the Sandy Point Domain visitors' centre on Sandy Point Road about 800 metres south of the Dunns Road intersection, and at the Oreti Park Rugby Football grounds on Dunns Road about 700 metres on the beach side of the Cabbage Tree Restaurant and Bar.

Those available with limited hours access include Teratonga Park and the Oreti Life Saving Club rooms at the beach for the Sandy Point area.

For Otatara it is at the Riding for the Disabled arena, Invercargill Golf Club, Otatara Bowling Club and our Four Square Supermarket.

As such, a huge amount of kudos needs to go out to these clubs, organisations and businesses for their foresight and commitment for placing these AEDs onsite. Something is hugely better than nothing.

I bring this all up as a discussion came up the other day at an Otatara Landcare Group meeting about the placement and access to these units, (probably because we are now getting to the age where we are going to be the ones that need them).

The issue being, that if one is needed you have about 20 minutes of CPR before things start going downhill rather badly. Also in doing CPR for 20 minutes you need a team of people because going at 120 compressions per minute (I've tried on a mannequin, not a real person) means that I (personally) tire after about one minute.

Compounding this the AEDs are often required at night when access is limited or restricted. Our discussion didn't really go anywhere conclusive, but in having a look at the map of Otatara and locations where the AED's are or aren't, there are a few places where further placements may be useful such as: Marama Ave North, Black Road/Watt Road/ Grant Road area and maybe somewhere around Ruru Ave/Ariki Ave/Rakiura Parade area.

Additionally, there is a possibility that some units in the area which currently have limited access times available could be changed to 24/7 access.

Placing additional units in private homes wouldn't be the best idea but perhaps we could take a leaf out of what Blackmount has done and place them in a mailbox. They would be locked but accessible by calling the ambulance on 111 and getting the combination.

If anyone decides they want to steal one I believe they are trackable.

It would be interesting to hear other people's thoughts on the matter, especially about placement and in particular where or how we could fund these additional units.

*Barry Smith*
*bjsrdms@gmail.com or 027 22 88 980*

# Otatara Landcare Group Membership

If you are not already a member and would like to help support the work of the Otatara Landcare Group, just fill in the form below and come and join us. We appreciate all our members both for their contributions of time and financial support. We can't do it without you.

## Membership Form

Please complete form for membership or if you require a receipt for any donation and email to otataralg@gmail.com.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone Numbers: (Hm) _____

(Mobile):_____

Email: (for newsletters and events) _____

_____

☐ I give permission for my contact details to be retained exclusively for the purposes of communication in relation to the activities of Otatara Landcare Group.

### Subs:

☐ **Subscription for Life Membership $50**

**Donations:** also welcome! *NON-PROFIT CHARITABLE ORG. INC*— CC47928
*All donations of $5 and over are tax deductible within allowable limits.*

☐ Donation: $_____

OLG bank account **03 1355 0805312 00**
Please use your surname and "olg subs" or "olg don" in reference boxes.

Alternatively, send completed form with cash to:
Lloyd Esler – 15 Mahuri Road, Otatara

Otatara Landcare Group:

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