

THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, Arataki Visitors Centre,
Monday 29 March, 2004**

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 30th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society.

The past year has been one of celebration as the Society turned thirty, starting with a wonderful birthday party at the Waitakere Hall on the 27th July. And the celebrations didn't stop there. We had the Ranges of Inspiration art exhibition and auction at the Corban Estate Arts Centre which raised over \$90,000. Thanks go to the artists who contributed their inspirational art works. The artists received their reserve prices which amounted to about \$60,000 with the balance of \$30,000 going to the Society's land acquisition fund, so as a fund raiser and as an art exhibition it was very successful. With a grant from Project Crimson to purchase eco-sourced Pohutukawa trees, we had a series of tree planting days last winter where we worked with local communities at Karekare, Piha and Te Henga. We gave certificates of honour to fifteen people who we considered had made outstanding contributions to conservation in the ranges. And to top the celebrations off, the land we purchased with your donations at 71 Turanga Rd is now fully paid up, a QE II covenant has been registered against the title, and we are about to gift it to the people of Auckland for inclusion in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park. This is our 30th birthday present to the people of Auckland. I feel that we celebrated our 30th year very well and while we honoured our past achievements we set new goals for the future.

There are still a number of outstanding District Plan appeals to which the Society is a party, and these are being resolved at present through mediation and when necessary and as a last resort, litigation. The most important of these appeals relate to the structure plan provisions in the eastern foothills of the ranges. We are opposed to structure plans in principle, as they are ultimately just another way of providing for subdivision. And without prohibited activity status on all subdivision above what is allowed for in the plan, non-complying applications will keep being made.

The granting of commercial concessions for canyoning in the ranges has been of great concern this year. Canyoning is an extreme form of adventure tourism where people pay to be guided off track and slide and abseil down streambeds, waterfalls and gorges. There are currently two licensed operators in the Park, at Kitekite Falls, Piha and Cowan Steam, Pararaha. The Society

was unsuccessful in opposing the concessions, and has subsequently filed a declaration with the Environment Court, the result of which to date has been a concerned response from the ARC and an increase in requirements for monitoring rare mosses and the overall impact of the activities. To compound this we are expecting soon a concerted offensive from the Federated Mountain Bike Clubs of NZ who have long sort to gain access to the Waitakere Ranges for the extreme sport of mountain biking. We fought hard seven years ago and managed to have mountain bikes banned from the Park, but it will take hard work to hold them back this time as the pressures on the park for new forms of recreation grow at an alarming rate. Already some mountain bikers are using the tracks illegally.

We are hoping that the renewed effort from the ARC and WCC to look at visitor and recreation impacts in the ranges will lead to a strong visitor management plan and consequently better tools for dealing with these ever increasing recreational pressures.

The Society keeps a watching brief on developments at the Te Henga quarry, the water quality issues at Lake Wainamu, and the weed eradication program in the Waitakere Valley wetlands. Thanks go to our representatives on these various committees.

At great expense the spray program seems to have been successful in eradicating the Painted Apple Moth. But this easily could happen again; biosecurity at ports of entry into New Zealand is lax and the borders are very porous. Many containers are not fumigated or checked. And while this time the spray program was effective, it met with public opposition and biosecurity breaches in the future will be harder to deal with on this scale when there is a perceived public health issue.

The Society was a sponsor of the EDS Protected Landscapes Conference held in July. Speakers from NZ and UK presented papers on why we need to protect areas of high scenic value and how to best achieve this in NZ. The conference proceedings, "Reclaiming our Heritage" is worth a read.

Throughout the year we have worked hard to progress the concept of a Heritage Area encompassing the whole of the ranges. We consider that permanent protection means that public and private property rights provided for now by the District Plan will be respected, while ensuring that the community can have certainty into the future that those provisions will not continue to change, as they have to date. This is the most important work of the Society at present, for if we cannot hold the line on non-complying subdivision and development, areas such as the eastern foothills and the coastal villages will very rapidly lose their present character, with far reaching consequences for the landscape and ecology of the ranges. The WCC and the ARC are currently consulting on the protection project and the forum to be held on 18 April is an important meeting which I hope many of you will attend.

The Waitakere Ranges book is growing more wonderful by the day. All text and images are now received and edited. The designer will be Paul Nicolai from Aura Creative, and the book will be

about 500 pages in full colour with hard covers. This book is going to be the definitive work on the Waitakere Ranges for some time to come and it is very important that it is authoritative while being accessible to a wide audience. It is hoped to have the book launch in October this year. Thanks especially to the editors Bruce and Trixie Harvey. This book will be a great advocate for the ranges and for the work that the Society has done to protect and conserve this area of such importance to New Zealand.

Our new improved newsletter has added to our advocacy very well, and thanks go to our editor Kath Dewar who makes each newsletter attractive and informative. The website continues to be developed by webmaster Mike Nixon and his team who are undertaking a complete overhaul of the site this year. Internet presence is an essential tool these days for the Society as we can ensure that it has the most up to date information about our work, and I recommend you all start to use it on a regular basis. As the amount of information on the site increases it becomes a real resource for students and visitors who want to know more about the Ranges and the Society.

Thanks go to the many experts who prepared submissions and evidence for us. I especially need to mention two people who constantly find time to give the Society their very best professional advice. To Douglas Allan and Gary Taylor the Society owes a great debt for their extremely generous *pro bono* contributions to our cause. Thanks also to Jan Caunter and Garry Law for preparing submissions and evidence for us during the year.

There are many people who have worked so hard for so long to achieve the Society's vision. Many of you are here tonight, and you will know others who have worked tirelessly to get us to this point. I acknowledge you all by saying that without each individual's contribution we would not be achieving the way we do.

I would mention here the sad passing away of Owen Hughes who was a strong supporter of the Society's work and was on the committee for many years. Owen made the Society a very generous bequest towards our work, for which we are most grateful, and Owen will be remembered as a person who was passionate about the protection of the ranges.

The successful day-to-day activities of the Society could not progress without a dedicated executive committee. I would like to ask the outgoing committee to stand up. These people are your elected committee who have given many volunteer hours over the past year. It has been a pleasure working with you all and I would like the meeting to join with me in showing our appreciation for their efforts on our behalf. Most of these people are standing again for the committee, but I would like to especially thank Jane Alexander, Simon Chapman and Sue Turner who will be standing down this. These three have given a huge effort to the Society's work over the past five years and we will miss their intelligence, humour and expertise.

Special thanks to Sandra Jones who as treasurer this year has really brought a new level of professionalism to the Society with her meticulous care of our finances and in a year when there has been more money than ever in the accounts due to the grants for the book, such care is

much needed and appreciated. I also want to thank Kath Dewar, our vice president, who has given her time and expertise on many issues and has given me great support throughout the year, especially in the absence of a secretary. The honorary audit of the Society's books this year by Martin Bailey of McGregor Bailey Ltd is gratefully acknowledged.

It has been an exciting and very busy year, but we have achieved some great progress and are in a very strong position as we go into what will be another very important year. The 30th birthday celebrations are over, and more than ever we need your support and your mandate for the coming year as we get closer to achieving our vision of permanent protection for the whole of the Waitakere Ranges.

John Edgar
President
Waitakere Ranges Protection Society
29 March 2004