

DISTRICT TREE POLICY

Submission from:

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This submission is about the New Plymouth District Council having a specific policy and giving extra weighting for the care and maintenance of the large trees especially those that make up the unique 'stands'¹ of kauri trees within the Pukekura, Brooklands Park area. With this in mind the submission also deals specifically with some aspects of their care and maintenance.

Introduction

In the long term New Plymouth has the potential to be yet more renowned for its numbers of large trees and the unique stands of these trees. During the 1930's thousands of kauri, not native to the region were planted within the present city limits. Because of limited manpower, resources and equipment early tree care was neglected. Now approximately 20metres tall, the stands are desperately in need of very major attention. This will be expensive, time consuming and maybe controversial.

To ensure that the task does not remain any longer in limbo, it seems appropriate that the maintenance of these very significant stands justifies specific policy in the District Tree Policy documents. Completion of the remedial work could require many years but a start needs to be made.

Kauri is an alien species in Taranaki, perhaps explaining why it was planted in thousands here even within the city. No other city can come near to this record, perhaps with any single species of a major tree. It is my belief that within 100 years New Plymouth will be most famous as "The City of Giants". Trees will be second only to the mountain as a tourist attraction but to help ensure this, provision must be made for work to start on what will be very controversial and costly thinning of these well established stands of kauri within the city. Because of their unique significance I feel that a specific policy to ensure their maintenance justifies a separate categorisation in compilation of the District Tree Policy.

¹ I would prefer the word 'Stand' to be used to describe a collection of trees that are growing together as a group rather than the term "Woodlot". Use of the word "Woodlot" to me seems to trivialise the amenity importance and introduce a commercial connotation. Whereas a 'Stand' bestows integrity which seems to be in sympathy with the purpose or reason for retention of groups of trees.

Historical Background

A brief history may help in understanding the great significance of these trees and why they come to be in need of special attention.

→ Dates given relate to the periods where the individuals concerned were directly involved with these plantings or ^{their} care and terminate in 1990 when amalgamation of councils necessitated transfer of parks administration from offices in Pukekura Park to Council Chambers in Liardet Street.

Relatively little detailed information is known about tree planting in the period from the opening day ceremonies of 29th May 1876 until W. W. Smith planted the first Kauri near the Boatshed Bridge in 1911.

→ W.W. Smith (1908-1920) is known to have planted many native species in the lower park area in the region of the walk that now bears his name.

Thomas Horton (T.H.) (1924-1949) arrived on the scene with a notable reputation as a nurseryman. By 1926 he had planted an avenue of native trees later to be named the 'Horton Walk' in his honour. Of much greater consequence in terms of our heritage of trees were the extensive plantings of kauri he carried out around 1935. This coincided with a major promotion of this species by Duncan & Davies which accounts also for the large planting on private land off Wallath Road by F. Cowling at about the same time.

In this period T.H. made a concentrated planting of kauri in the Fillis Street Gully together with at least one specimen of practically every other major native species. The Fillis Street stand already dominates the skyline as seen from the city.

Brooklands had just been entrusted to the care of NP. Borough Council (1934) and T.H. planted the cow paddock facing Brooklands Road with batches of hundreds of native trees. It has always been intriguing that they were all planted in 'nurseryman's rows' at 8' x 6' spacing. Novel, but I forecast that this stand of native trees is likely to become New Plymouth city's major 'drive past' tourist attraction in the future. As the canopy rises the trunks, fronted by kahikateas will be a magnificent sight.

→ T.H. was deeply embroiled in the 'Battle of the Pines' (1931). (It must be remembered that in the late 1800's hundreds of *Pinus radiata* were planted, mostly in large groupings. They rapidly provided pictorial character and shelter for other species) Fifty years later some advocated that all the pines should be felled, others would have them all retained. The compromise of a gradual removal was adopted. This was interrupted by yet bigger battles on the world scene from 1939-45. The care of the park became a secondary factor in the climate of the day.

→ J.W. Goodwin (J.W.G.) (1949-1977) Jack Goodwin's knowledge of dendrology is pitched on an international scale and he took over the running of the park ^{when it was} in a very run down condition. This is in no disrespect to T.H. who had nurtured it through a long wartime and post war period when staff and funds were just not available. Areas had been converted to air raid shelters and much routine maintenance was not carried out.

When J.W.G. was first introduced to the Fillis Street Gully access involved cutting a track through creepers which had burdened some of the 15year old kauri into horizontal submission. He subsequently felled hundreds of specimens of rogue sycamore and tree strawberry and then revived the 'Battle of the Pines' by implementing a policy of felling a succession of large blocks of pine and macrocarpa. In the 1960's he replanted some of the resulting spaces with a wide diversity of species but with natives well represented. Thirty five years later these plantings are now skyline features.

A.D. Jellyman (A.D.J.) (1962-1990) Alan joined J.W.G.'s team as a person dedicated to tree care amongst many other attributes and great progress was made in catching up on remedying neglect. Very notable was his major input into clearing, planning, and replanting of the eastern and western hillsides of Pukekura Park in the mid 1960's. When elevated to Deputy Director, his great knowledge and skills were dispersed more widely but he always maintained close links with tree work.

G.Fuller (1965-1990) I joined the staff with a brief to oversee the acquisition of a major orchid collection being donated to the park and further promoted orchids as a significant attraction. When appointed as curator in 1966 my inherent interest in trees soon found expression. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to work under the supervision of J.W.G. and A.D.J. especially in terms of work with the trees.

In many quarters I am best remembered for introduction to the park of the orchids, waterfall and waterwheel, but in the ultimate long term I feel that my greatest contribution was in terms of tree care and surgery. After the reduction of congestion at ground level I moved into the upper canopy using cumbersome chain-saws not designed for such work. There is now little visible evidence of our endeavours over that period.

Continuing care and maintenance of the unique stands of Kauri within city limits.

It is very erroneous to assume that because a tree is a 'native', all that is required is to plant it in the ground and nature will nurture it to our high expectations. Faced with this scenario, many native species are exposed to greater risks than those species that have been introduced from other countries.

→ With my work with these trees and other trees in Pukekura and Brooklands I am convinced any potentially tall tree which in early growth has been allowed to develop with two or more equal leaders is almost certainly destined to self-destruct. This is especially so where the angle of junction is less than 20degrees. THEORETICALLY the formation of multiplye

leaders is reduced by planting trees close together. However this has not been the case with these stands of trees. Once they outgrow their juvenile competition and emerge from the canopy there is I feel a far greater risk for self destruction.

→ Sadly the stands of kauri at Fillis Street, Brooklands, and Cowling Reserve contain a disturbingly high proportion of such trees with multiple^e leaders which I feel must be removed. Their removal for the welfare of the remainder will be a very complex and costly undertaking which could be fraught with controversy and almost inevitable need to be programmed over several years. If not removed their natural demise will result in considerable damage to neighbouring trees.

→ We were acutely aware of this problem early on in my period at the park but after first of all having experienced years of delay due to conflicting views by experts over which trees should be removed and by what means, we were never able to summon the resources and skills to even make a start. This type^o removal is to some extent an area of uncharted territory especially amongst kauri and we could be pioneers in this area of tree care.

Conclusion

→ Despite the fact that prominent arborists for over 40 years have been aware of the problem of multiple^e leaders and the ongoing care these kauri require it has never been documented and consequently no action has been taken. I feel this situation would not have arisen had there been in existence a written policy. Action is now needed to get documented the problem and the ongoing care that is required. The purpose behind my submission is to have the council include in the District Tree Policy specific written policy for these unique stands of trees.

The one abiding regret I have in terms of 'unfinished business' as the consequence of retirement is that by 1990 I had not been able to undertake this essential tree care operation. To think that it would have been largely obviated had someone gone through these plantings in 1940 with only a pair of secateurs and removed the multiple leaders.

→ I must say I am very favourably impressed with the scope of the draft of the District Tree Policy and congratulate those who are involved with its compilation. The council is also to be congratulated at making a start on getting down in writing a specific policy dealing with the long term management of our trees which such an important asset to the city.



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