

## The thinning of Kauri Grove

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Photos courtesy of Bruce MacDonald

In 1936-1938, 500 Kauri (*Agathis australis*) and many other native trees were closely-planted by Thomas Horton in that part of Brooklands now known as Kauri Grove ("The planting of Kauri Grove" *Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park* 5(3)(October 2010): 4-7). Apparently, these Kauri were thinned about 15 years later by Jack Goodwin who succeeded Thomas Horton as Curator of Pukekura Park. Many years afterwards, in 2002, Jack Goodwin recalled that "a thinning of approximately 50% was carried out in about 1950 as the stand was already displaying signs of suppression. The logs responded to treatment (tanalising) about the same as *Pinus radiata* and some were used to form the entrance pergola at Brooklands Zoo" (Smith & Fuller *The notable trees of New Plymouth* (2007: 25)). Unfortunately, nothing more is known about this first attempt to manage the many Kauri that had been planted in the grove.



In 2001, the New Plymouth District Council approached Forest Research (now Scion) of Rotorua to develop management options for Kauri Grove. An assessment in September 2002 by Bryan Gould, Manager, Premier Parks, New Plymouth District Council and Greg Steward, Scientist, Forest Research identified many multi-leadered, suppressed, and dead standing trees. The data gathered indicated the need for a thinning of the Kauri to allow for the continued development of retained trees and to improve stand health and public safety. Their report suggested several options for thinning of the Kauri. A well-attended community workshop, organised by the District Council in association with Tane's Tree Trust, was held on 4 October 2002. The workshop, which included a visit to Kauri Grove, provided an opportunity to learn about and discuss Kauri ecology and management and the reasons behind the Council's intention to thin the trees in the grove.

Thinning of the Kauri began in November 2002. The work was undertaken by the District Council's Parkscape staff under the leadership of Bruce MacDonald, now senior consulting arborist for Asplundh, to whom I am grateful for



the photographs that accompany this article. Some of the wood from felled trees that was suitable for wood-turning was made available to local wood turners, and samples from the trunks and leaders of 20 of the larger-diameter trees felled were obtained by Forest Research for research purposes. The samples provided the raw material for a paper entitled “Plantation-grown New Zealand Kauri: A preliminary study of wood properties” that appeared in the *New Zealand Journal of Forestry Science* 35(1)(2005): 35-49. The stumps of the felled trees, and the trunks and leaders that were not otherwise utilised, were left on site to break down naturally. Records held at the Pukekura Park Curator’s office show that 129 Kauri had been felled as at 11 February 2003. Illustrated articles about the thinning appeared in the *Taranaki Daily News* of 24/9/2002, 13/11/2002, 27/6/2003, and 18/8/2003. About 86 living Kauri remain in the grove.

George Fuller, while Curator of Pukekura Park from 1965-1990, had wanted to undertake thinning in Kauri Grove, but constraints of finance and time prevented him doing so. On 9 May 2003 he wrote to the Mayor of New Plymouth commending the Council on the steps it took to fully acquaint the community with the reasons for and methods to be adopted prior to what was to inevitably be a controversial exercise. George told the Mayor that he was “also very impressed with the standard of workmanship carried out by the team of arborists involved in the thinning process. Removal of malformed and ailing specimens in such a dense stand without damage to those chosen to remain is a particularly complex and demanding activity involving the use of chainsaws near tree-top level. Dismantling trees from the top downwards is not a task for the faint-hearted! This team employed techniques which in my day had not even been dreamed about. Their level of skill was so great that I have to confess that perhaps it was just as well in the long-run that we didn’t manage to find the time or finance to get on with the task because we would have been obliged to use the “one base-cut and run like Hell” technique which would definitely not have been in the best interests of the residual trees”.





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