

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust 2014 – Members' Workshop Outcomes

Last year, the Board agreed that a review of how Pukeiti Inc. was running was both timely and essential given the change in ownership to the TRC.

At the AGM in October, Shona Glentworth ran a session with members where small groups addressed a series of questions. Shona has now come back with a summary of things going well, things to improve and priorities within a vision for the future which resulted from discussions at the workshop

This summary and action plan follows. If you have any feedback on this please send a note to the Secretary PO Box 1066, New Plymouth 4340

The Board will further discuss the implementation of the plan in their July meeting.

Vision for the future

1. A high profile, well resourced organisation with a good reputation
2. Strong, vibrant and participative membership with a strong sense of belonging
3. An inspirational environment, valued by the community
4. Accessible for all, with features to attract visitors
5. Education function with strong ties to schools and interaction between members and the public
6. A rhododendron collection of international repute

Members' Activities

Things to protect (going well)

- Winter Lunch & Spring Autumn meetings
- Members' plant schemes
- Garden Forums
- Resources and their upgrade
- No charge
- Trust's financial contribution to TRC
- Quality of newsletter
- Website
- Tours
- Expertise available to the TRC
- Café
- Children's programme
- Members helping at festivals

Things to improve (Could be better)

- Working bees
- Perception of Membership vs Friends
- Clear understanding of relationships between TRC and the Trust
- Better information re member benefits
- Perception of TRC ownership and role of members
- Utilisation of The Lodge
- Increasing members' use of facilities
- Promotion of the collections
- Telling stories to visitors, publicity, interpretation
- How to influence forward planning
- Remaining a strong partner
- Ensuring staff continue to value our input
- Website, technology, social media

Priorities

- More collaboration with TRC
- Trust and value the partnership
- Build and promote conservation value of rhododendron collection
- Membership
 - Resolve perceived differences between Friends and Membership of the Trust
 - Double the Membership
 - Plants for Members
- Build public profile and interaction between members and public
- Work with the TRC to achieve asset management plan

Priorities initiated so far - A report from the Board Chairman

More collaboration with TRC to ensure the value of the partnership

- We now have regular meeting with TRC apart from Board meetings to discuss details of matters that affect both parties
- We have made submissions on the TRC Long Term Plan

Build and promote conservation value of Rhododendron Collection

- The Board has appointed members to the Gardens Advisory Group which oversees and consults on planting within the garden
- We are in discussion over the Plant Collection Strategy with regard to improving this to be a world leading document, utilising the skills of the Gardens Advisory group and key Board members with expertise in this area

- In our submissions on the TRC Long Term Plan we have asked that a stronger emphasis be placed on conservation of rhododendrons

Membership

- TRC has advised that they will willingly utilise any volunteer be they a friend or a member to work in the garden at anytime
- **Double membership** - This will take more work and members will recall we have had on-going discussion with kindred groups. These discussions are still being held so watch this space
- **Plants for members** - This is something that is highly valued and it is the Board's intention to enhance this in coming years

Public profile and interaction between members and public

- TRC branding is giving profile to the garden and gives clear definition between the Trust and the TRC

Achieve Asset Management Plan

- The Asset Management Plan has been supported by the Trust and there has already been significant deliverables from that plan with more to come
- Trust is prepared to fund raise along with its members to support the garden



Pukeiti NEWSLETTER

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust Inc.

www.pukeiti.org.nz



The Lodge - Spring 2014

Arriving at Pukeiti last week for the meeting of the Members' Committee a traffic jam of earth-moving equipment, heaps of earth, freshly carved clay banks and rough metal covering newly extended car parks – waiting for completion – greeted us. Inside the gates the Covered Walk had been removed and the foundations for the new one laid, the frame work of the Perrott House and Conservatory had been painted and prepared for re-glazing. Both will form part of the new Covered Walk which, at the moment, is surrounded by the paraphernalia of a construction site. Little wonder that the work of the staff has been concentrated on preparing for this expanded facility. All the plants have been potted and transferred to the shade houses and nursery and will be replanted when the new structure, a new



home for the world famous collection of Vireyas, is completed – hopefully by the Garden Festival at the end of October. Truckloads of mulch produced from the trees removed from the expanded upper car park have been spread around the garden and soil removed from the sites has been stockpiled both in the Founders' Garden and at the Cook Block for later use in developments including the Keiller Garden, which will also receive a quantity of compost produced at Pukeiti. Most of the structures planned for this garden have been completed and the garden planting is being drawn up. This will emphasise ways in which

rhododendrons can be used with other complementary plants in a home garden setting.

Other work has included the pruning and shaping of the azaleas throughout the gardens which in places show the detrimental effect of the last two dry summers which particularly hit the new plantings. The dryness is hard to imagine given the present very wet autumn which has affected the progress on the various projects. For the staff the highlight has been their shift into the new quarters positioned in the nursery area. Plants here have been re-potted, fertilised and are looking good. Seeds sent from overseas, and cleared by the authorities have been planted. These are mainly *Maddenia* species. They will increase

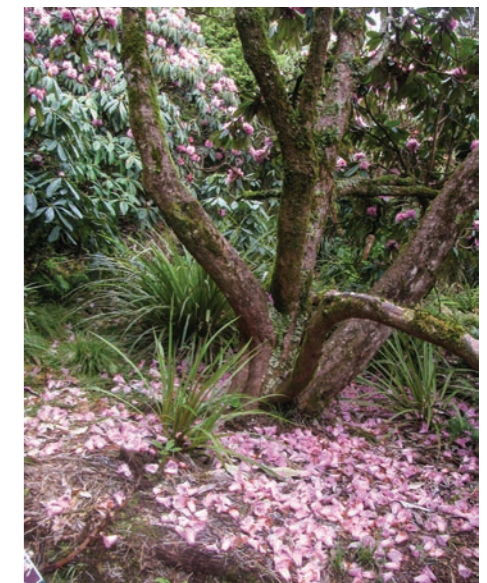
the gene pool of species already in the collection.

On a sad note the renowned *R protistum* 'Pukeiti' grown from seed collected by Kingdon Ward in 1952 has been removed. It was in decline suffering from *Phytophthora* for a number of years and despite regular treatments of fungicide drench around the roots it could not be saved. The wood, and a good pile too, is being dried and hopefully will be turned into bowls, and other articles, providing souvenirs of this once iconic tree. Fortunately, too, over the years plants have been propagated from it, and these as well as seedlings are planted around the garden, some of which have already flowered. Over the years a number of rhododendrons especially the big-leaf forms have succumbed to this disease. It laps up the wet warm climate.

Finally it is good to report that work on refurbishment of The Lodge is about to begin. Plans have been completed and the Trust has been asked to clear out the building by the end of the month in preparation for the work. This will be extensive and will provide three well-appointed accommodation units, as well as improved members' facilities. The environs will also be changed leaving The Lodge in a garden setting.

The prospect of the completion of this work is exciting.

Lynn Bublitz.



R protistum 'Pukeiti' at the foot of the Giant Rata is no more.

From the Members' Committee



Revive the Memories Day - Members boarding for a drive around the garden.

Members' Activities This Year

Our first event of the year was a choice of two guided walks for members followed by an afternoon tea put on by the Members' Committee. The walk to the Paint Mines was a pleasant stroll through the garden till we reached the Stead Block, where we turned left onto the White Walk and followed the Puketewhiti Stream until we crossed it by the swingbridge and left it behind as we started climbing up the Summit Track. When we reached the Summit Road the group was unanimous in wanting to detour to the Pukeiti Hill Lookout before continuing on to the Paint Mines. Rain during the week had cleared the air and we had lovely views up the coast towards Raglan. From there it was all down hill to the mines which in effect are deep holes now filled with water and fenced off from the track, as otherwise one could easily stumble into them unaware of their presence. The history around them is very interesting and combined with the Hauler

Stations and parts of the Tram Track that we traversed made for an interesting walk. Lunch was at the shelter just past the mines and then it was along the undulating Conservation Track, to the Loop Track and back over the swingbridge. We then turned right onto the White Walk and back to The Lodge via the Giant Rata and a discussion about the removal of the original *Rhododendron protistum* 'Pukeiti' and the plans to plant its replacement. Back at The Lodge we joined the other group of walkers and enjoyed our thoroughly earned cuppa. The other group, led by Brian Palmer with help from members on the walk, took a route much closer to The Lodge identifying, mainly native, plants of interest.

Three days later some of us were back up at Pukeiti to propagate semi-hard cuttings that will be grown on for a couple of years before appearing on our Members' Plant List. Lynn Bublitz had chosen an interesting selection of special plants to be propagated and the members present were very efficient in their cutting and potting up. Most of us have now done this two or three times so are starting to feel confident in what we are doing, although the success rate of the cuttings may yet prove this confidence to be misplaced!

Our High Tea for our resthome residents again went well. It is such a joy to spend an afternoon with these members who have given so much to Pukeiti in the past and without whose efforts we would not have the beautiful garden we have today. We are

A Trip to the King Country



Anzac Weekend saw a group of 6 intrepid members join me and Peter, acting as the driver, to climb into a 12 seater van and head north for a weekend of fun and gardens in the King Country. We were followed north by two other members, in their own car, as they joined the trip after we had filled the van. First stop was at Mokau to stretch our legs and grab a cup of coffee and biscuit before driving on to the Robertson's garden at Straun Farm just south of Piopio. Karen and John were away this weekend but John's sister kindly came down from Te Kuiti to show us around and tell us the history of the property. The farm has been in the family since John's father returned from WWII and started farming

there. Rosemary (John's mother) was a keen gardener and the homestead garden is currently being rejuvenated. We spent most of our time wandering around the wonderful specimen trees in the paddock neighbouring the homestead. Sixty year old conifers, chestnuts, walnuts and a female *Ginkgo biloba* gave us plenty to look at and discuss.

After lunch at The Fat Pigeon in Piopio, where we were joined by the remaining members of the group who had come down from Northland and Tokoroa, we drove out to the Mangaotaki Valley to visit 'Hairy Feet'. Nestled under towering limestone cliffs in a quiet valley with a goblin-like native forest, is the location of Staddle Farm, Trollshaws

finding however, that many of our members who were equally involved in the volunteer work at Pukeiti at the same time are missing from this afternoon celebration because they are not in resthomes. Next year we plan to open up our Revive the Memories Day to all our members who have passed that magical mark of 'four score years'. That way we will hear even more great tales about the history of the gardens and the afternoon will be more enjoyable for everyone.

The plant sales, compared to last year, went ballistic and I think this reflects the excellent list we had to offer members this year. The selection of plants was eclectic and as such members were able to purchase a range of plants rarely available in garden centres – which of course is the aim of the list as we don't want to compete with other nurseries but rather, supplement what they are doing. It was good to notice the number of people who took advice to order by return post if they wanted the plants in short supply, and a note has been made of plants that were over subscribed and we will attempt to provide these again in future lists.

Autumn Members' Day again saw members have the opportunity to stroll around the garden with Graham who showed them the latest developments and discussed planting plans that have come from the Plant Forum. After the pot luck lunch Gordon Bailey gave a talk updating the members present on what decisions the Board is currently making and Lynn Bublitz talked about the plans for The Lodge renovation which the TRC has brought forward and will start later this year.

and the home of 'Sting'. Now, for those of you who have not seen 'The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey' and who at this stage are yawning and pleased you didn't come, you missed a treat. Most of us were also in the former category and would never have done this if not for the tour arrangements. Peter was so convinced he wasn't participating he had his Kindle with him so he could have a peaceful read whilst the rest of us wasted our time but, at the last minute changed his mind and decided to come. Well what a delight. Suzie & Warrick Denize, the youngish couple who own the farm, have designed a fascinating tour starting with a short film showing the farm whilst it was being used by Peter Jackson

and the cast and crew. They then take you on a drive to the main filming locations, entertaining you the whole way with a very professional yarn (full, I suspect, of fact padded with a little fiction) about the filming, the props, and their journey through the whole experience. Warrick had worked hard to get some old, lichen encrusted farm fencing used in the film, left behind. This combined with the extensive use of the forest and naturally occurring limestone formations means more of this film location remains intact than most if not all other filming sites.

Suzie would get us to stand in a position, show us some special natural feature and then show us a photo of the same scene from the film. They had us picking which features were naturally occurring and which had been made by Weta Workshop (not an easy task) all the time entertaining us with wonderful stories like how the film crew had to tone down the colour of the bush because it looked less natural than the Weta Props which augmented the native trees and how you get Gandolf to look so tall compared to the hobbits? (You'll have to take the tour for that answer). We went to the exit from the cave that contained the hoard of troll weapons and re-enacted Gandolf bestowing the sword 'Sting' upon Bilbo. Question: Does Lynn have hairy feet? And we could have seen and heard even more and we would readily have stayed to be further entertained by this very capable young couple but... there was another garden to visit still.

It was then back to The Fat Pigeon to collect the cars our out of towners had left there. Back on SH3, the van is followed by three cars – Mercy sakes alive, we had ourselves a convoy. But Peter didn't put the hammer down and we came across no bears and just north of Te Kuiti, in the hills overlooking the town, the convoy came to a stop at Bev Punch's Garden. Bev has recently taken over the large garden that Keith Waghorn and his wife established over many years. Bev is currently busy taming trees and shrubs that have outgrown their location and has a lot of work ahead of her but it is an extensive country garden with many interesting plants to view.

Sunday dawned fine and sunny and after a leisurely breakfast we took off for Parkwood, the garden of Ailsa and Carey Sanson on Old Te Kuiti Road, just south of Otorohanga. This is an extensive garden with many 'rooms' to it. After we all looked at the 'English Garden' and went through the Gate of Memories which is made of and surrounded by mementoes of past events in the lives of the Sansons, the group viewing the garden suddenly diminished in size. Evidently half of us had been hijacked by Carey and led off to his 'shed'. Some time later they reappeared having had a great time looking at Carey's collection of old farm equipment consisting of among other things, several old tractors. The rest of us

continued walking around the garden listening to the stories of its development, but the shed group didn't miss anything as we had ample time to see it all.

Following this we went to Brook Park – Motakiora – situated beside Bosco Café on the boundary of the Te Kuiti township. The many exotic trees form an umbrella over the hillside and when seen in autumn they present a mass of colour, but we were a bit early to see the full beauty of this so instead we stood around having a cuppa (sans milk, cos Heather forgot it) and a biscuit. David Sampson had disappeared soon after we arrived (as he is prone to do) and arrived back just as we were about to leave to tell us about the Blackman Conifer Collection he'd just visited. It was decided that we must go and see this even if it meant we might be a bit late for lunch, it was just too good an opportunity to miss, after all seldom do you get to see a collection of approximately 300 conifers with the knowledgeable David and Noeline Sampson to tell you all about them. I was particularly taken by the many dwarf conifers that would be perfect for urban gardens if only they were still being propagated, and we were so lucky that David and Noeline were with us or else we would have left the park blissfully unaware of the collection's existence as it is out of sight of the drive and not signposted at all.

Next a drive into the countryside and out to Bennydale for lunch at the Wooden Heart. The relatively new Timber Trail cycle track has done for Bennydale what the Central Otago Rail Trail has done for many of the small towns in the Maniototo and this café is well worth stopping at.

A few kilometres from Bennydale is Tapuwae, Doff Tombleson's large and notable garden. If there is a plant Doff doesn't have in this garden then I think one must question its horticultural worth, so extensive is her selection. Doff is passionate about her garden and is a charming, knowledgeable host who is more than happy to share plants with fellow garden enthusiasts.

Back to the motel for a second night and more pre-dinner drinks followed by another lovely dinner in the motel's restaurant. These dinners tended to carry on (probably for longer than the staff hoped although there was never a hint that we should be leaving) such was the conviviality of the group.

Monday morning and the good weather had deserted us but despite the rain, no-one wanted to miss Jill Mouat's Garden. Jill has been gardening at Aramatai for two years and like Bev she has taken over a large garden which is in need of some serious work. Jill is in constant contact with the past owners who continue to be very helpful in sharing their knowledge, which Jill thoroughly appreciates, because although she has had lovely gardens before, this is the first one involving large trees, and large trees she has in glorious abundance. Despite the rain, Jill guided us around her garden sharing her plans and listening attentively to the more



Clematis cirrhosa at Parkwood



Crocus sativus - Saffron Crocus at Parkwood



R 'Edith Carey' at Tapuwae



R *facetum* at Tapuwae

knowledgeable members in the group. By the end of the walk the rain was easing off. At this point we farewelled our Tokoroa couple and back at 5 mile junction we farewelled the Northland member. Because of the rain and a slightly altered schedule, we arrived one hour early at The Fat Pigeon. After we managed to secure seats for us all, the lunch went smoothly and the staff hardly batted an eye at the inconvenience we caused.

I would really like to thank Sue Wagstaff who responded brilliantly when asked for ideas about what gardens should be visited by sending back virtually the itinerary we followed, along with contact names, and phone numbers. Without her help the organisation would have been much more difficult. Also to Lynn Bublitz, Alistair Duncan, Noeline and David Sampson who contributed the expert plant knowledge that I was lacking.

Heather Robson - Members' Committee Chair