

A network of volunteers prepared to help maintain the historic and indigenous natural features of the reserve and adjoining slopes

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**Hayward
Scenic
Reserve**



Newsletter No 9

Track Improvements: Thanks to sterling work done both by w
bee participants and by a few individuals, access along, up or do
several of the lesser used tracks is now greatly improved.

Mawson Ridge Track: Here the crossing of the upper reaches of the Tyndall Creek has always been somewhat of a challenge, especially since the February 2004 deluge. This section of the track has now been re-routed to not only make the crossing quite straightforward, but also to restore it to where the Hayward family had originally located it. Because of Greg Young's shift to Hawkes Bay, routine maintenance on this track was minimal for quite some time. This has now been rectified with recently joined members, Alex and Barbara Bridger, having agreed to "adopt" this track.

McStay Track: This track now serves as a useful link between the Mawson Ridge and Mawson Catchment Tracks. Originally it was a possum trapping trail on which the descent to the Mawson Catchment Track was rather steep and slippery. This section of the track has been re-routed recently to make it much easier for reserve visitors to use.

Mawson Catchment Track: A major section of this track comprises a zigzag route up steep, crumbly ground with a mahoe-dominant bush canopy. The combined impact of windfalls and erosion over time rendered the precise route somewhat hard to follow in places. This problem has now been remedied by the clearance of windfalls, the placement of obvious track markers, and general redefining of the zigzag bench formation. Future work includes facing many of the newly cut steps with timber to prevent their gradual collapse by erosion.

Lower Griffins Ridge Track: The February 2004 storm severely damaged the vegetation on and adjacent to this track. Soon afterwards, the impact of this, coupled with rampant snakefeather growth, rendered the route virtually impassable. Since then substantial tree growth has occurred, forming a canopy over most of the ridge line. Over recent months Andrew Crane, whose property more or less backs on to Griffins Ridge, has managed to reopen a well marked way up the ridge as far as the junction with the Mawson Catchment Track. While some further work is desirable to fully restore this track, it is indeed pleasing that this historic route is now once again currently useable with care.

New Track Opened: Back in August, while trying to locate a tree-mounted possum trap which I last used over 2 years ago, I was surprised to discover that somebody had cut quite a wide track across the slope between the Mawson catchment and the base of Griffins Ridge. The new track starts not far above and to the south of the junction of the McStay and Mawson Catchment Tracks. It does seem that the mystery track-cutter has in fact cleared an old historic farm track that once crossed this rather steep slope. Given that old fence lines in the vicinity confirm that the area was originally clear-felled and used for grazing, we think "*The Old Farm Track*" would be the most appropriate name for it. I'm pleased to say this new track provides a number of advantages. It now gives public land access to walkers wanting to go up or to exit from the bottom of the lower Griffins Ridge Track, the only option previously being to cross private property. From a pest-plant control and land management point of view, it provides valuable additional access to an area of steep, heavily weed-infested reserve land, especially snakefeather. The huge volume of mature snakefeather located here has probably been the major source of berries consumed by birds, giving rise to the rapid spread of these nasty pest plants northwards along the eastern hills over recent years.

Snakefeather Control: I can recommend a walk along the Old Farm Track and up the lower Griffins Ridge Track to gain a proper appreciation of the menace which fully mature snakefeather (*asparagus scandens*) poses to regenerating native bush and hence the long term stability of the eastern hills. In the late-summer/autumn months of recent years Council contractors have concentrated on spraying infestations on the lower slopes of the reserve, with encouraging success. Much has been learnt from this experience. However, achieving an adequate water pressure from street level mains has limited the height at which widespread spraying by professionals could be carried out. Furthermore, by not spraying **before** the annual berry crop has ripened and been eaten by birds, the seeds of this pest plant have continued to be spread unabated. The authorities now recognise the need to tackle earlier in the season the massive mature infestation on Griffins Ridge and across the upper Mawson catchment area, the major source of the annual berry crop as previously mentioned. A water tank is being installed in a hollow on the old Mawson firebreak above the top of Griffins Ridge, a site well above the maximum altitude at which snakefeather can become established. The tank is capable of being filled as needed from a tanker truck on the Towai service road, thereby providing a gravity-fed water supply suitable for widespread spraying. A contractor is expected to be chosen shortly.

Other Pest Plants: Most members residing close to the reserve will recall hearing chainsaws operating over several weeks during the winter when GWRC contractors were felling unwanted exotic trees, mainly wattle species, but also *Hawthorn* and *Holly*. Evidence of their endeavours are the brown patches (comprising either cleared ground or dead fallen trees) which are now clearly visible from the valley floor and which are generating inquiries from curious members of the public. The felling of mature trees is exposing wattle seeds in the ground to stronger light, resulting in their germination, particularly the *Prickly Moses* and *Sydney* species. Because wattle seedlings are very easily pulled out of the ground, members are asked to assist by doing this whenever they see them, but remember to wear gloves when removing young *Prickly Moses* plants!! Sadly some *Prickly Moses* and *Hawthorn* stumps are now suckering (sprouting regrowth). Rosie Doole advises that any such cases will be dealt with next year when seedling regrowth is followed up.

HCC has a regular contractor who deals with reported *Banana Passionfruit* and *Japanese Honeysuckle* infestations. Please convey direct to Rosie Doole (Rosie.Doole@huttcity.govt.nz) or to me a clear location description of any infestations you may encounter. *Boneseed* is another nasty weed we want to eradicate from the reserve. Young plants are easily pulled out. Older plants that break off at the base when pulled can be dealt with by those of us who have a bottle of Vigilant gel herbicide supplied by HCC.

Recently, a member of the Botanical Society reported finding an infestation of ***Montpellier Broom*** (*Teline monspessullana*) on the Dry Creek Zigzag Track. This yellow flowering, erect woody pest plant originated from Europe, is very cold tolerant and thrives on hill country as well as coastal sites, riverbeds and waste spaces. Seed dispersal is localised by explosive bursting of pods in the summer. Hopefully, by cutting off the branches close to ground level and dabbing the remainder with Vigilant gel, working bees will be able to stop the spread of this pest plant and eventually eradicate it from the reserve.

Animal Pest Control: Notwithstanding that Andrew Crane has this year occasionally heard a possum-like noise at night in the bush behind his place, 4 traps set in that vicinity over several weeks caught nothing but 2 hedgehogs and 1rat. Prior to GWRC's most recent possum control campaign in the reserve and adjoining slopes, possums used to descend every springtime to gorge themselves on the newly emerged leaf buds on the large oak trees at the bush edge behind Brian Shearer's home at 39 Mawson St. Telltale signs of their feasting were the messy droppings on the wooden deck below one of the trees. That this did not happen this current spring is I believe another indication of minimal possum presence so far in the reserve.

Rats are therefore now the most significant animal pest needing on-going control. We have several DoC design rat trap tunnels deployed off-track in parts of the reserve. While rats are being caught in these, mice can also set the traps off and escape without being killed. What I believe to be a more

effective rat control tool are rat-bait tunnels comprising small lengths of Marley plastic spouting inverted and fastened to the ground using wire tent pegs. These are baited with *Contra Blox*, an anticoagulant poison in block form with a narrow hole through the middle. By inserting a bolt of suitable length and gauge through the block hole and a hole drilled in the tunnel roof, the baits can be readily suspended from the tunnel roof and held in place by a wingnut. Baited tunnels of this type are currently being deployed in different parts of the reserve by Barbara de St Croix, Don Millward and myself. Having just been given several more long pieces of Marley spouting, I intend making more tunnels for volunteers to deploy and replenish with baits as needed. The baits are supplied to me in 8kg buckets and paid for by HCC. If you would like to join in the anti-rat campaign by deploying and looking after baited tunnels, please contact me.

Stoats, hedgehogs and feral cats are other animal pests present in the reserve. A few stoats have been caught in the two DoC 200 design traps we have had in use for quite some time. However, sightings made recently indicate that stoat density is greatest on the higher slopes where rabbits abound.

Walkway Signs: In past summers the location of the Mawson St entrance to the reserve has not been obvious to the general public. Rosie Doole is arranging for HCC "Walkway" signs to be placed on the power pole at the entrance to Mawson St and on the street light pole outside my home at No 37 in the vehicle turnaround area. The positioning of the latter will point people to proceed up the public right-of-way on the north side of the private road. HCC has already placed a prominent "To Whites Line" sign at the Hayward Track entrance.

Future Working Bees: With the cancellation of the 17 October event due to forecast rainy weather, the working bee from 2.00-5.00pm on Sunday 8 November, doing maintenance on the Dry Creek Zigzag Track, is the only one remaining on the pre-Xmas schedule. However, because it will take at least 2 working bees to undertake the work that needs doing to bring this lovely track up to tip top condition for the summer, we will shortly be notifying members by email of the date and time for a second working bee to be held prior to Xmas.

As previously advised in Newsletter No. 8, a "Planning Committee" comprising Annette Beattie, Alison Sinclair, Leon Ramakers and myself, has been formed to determine the tasks and set the priorities for future working bees. Shortly, we will commence drawing up a work programme for the first quarter of 2010. So now is the time for the wider membership to walk their favourite tracks and advise us of any track maintenance tasks which they consider are beyond the capability of one or two people to satisfactorily deal with on their own.

Apology: While in the course of compiling this newsletter in stages over several days, I lost part of the group's logo. I'm not sufficiently computer savvy to know why this occurred, let alone how to rectify the problem. I can but apologise for the less than professional appearance of this document, and promise to try hard to do better next time!!

Russ McStay
15 October 2009