

PUKEKURA PARK .. POSSIBLE FUTURE

DEVELOPMENTS

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Does Pukekura Park constitute an embarrassment to local residents? At first thought, this may appear a ridiculous yet in many respects it is justified and this is discounting the views of those citizens who feel that it is a financial embarrassment to the community.

Let us consider the resident with visitors who have heard about the park and would like to be shown around. If he or she is average, no effort will have been made to read up the published literature about the park ( or even the city) and the last visit would have coincided with the last party of inquisitive visitors. Once again there will be the series of impossible questions such as. "How big is the park", "How old is it", "How far away is the mountain," "How many people work here," "What colour are they going to paint the bridge when they give it a top coat," etc., etc., all difficult to answer with no leads to work on.

Well, if our stalwort has not yet experienced embarrassment at lack of knowledge of his own locality, it is almost certain to come when the subject of a visit to the fernery is suggested, for he has either to look big and shout the lot, look little and he shouted amid remarks of, 'Oh! they don't charge down our way,' turn either an ashen white or ghastly purple, stagger into the shade on the fernery lawn muttering "Its alright I'll be fine, you go on in and I'll just wait here in the cool," or tell a blatant lie by saying that he or she had been in the week before or a dozen times previously.

This may all seem a little fanciful, but regretably, it is based on fact. There is no surer means of splitting up a party of visitors and locals, parents and children, plant lovers and plant tolerators than the suggestion of a visit to the fernery. That 20c. is a mighty hurdle, especially if faced more than once and I have personally seen it split three parties out of four on one occasion.

We have before us then, two major issues, the dissemination of information to the public, the question of admission fees to the fernery. Since I have no solution to the latter, it will be covered first by simply recording a few facts.

About 25% of those intending to visit the fernery change their mind at the door, some in obvious (and audible) alarm. Of those groups containing local residents who find the fernery by accident the local often has to think remarkably quickly and usually assures the rest that there is nothing of much interest. After all, there is no outward indication to dispute his suggestion and because he would have to be host, visitors are reluctantly ushered away.

Local residents are the hardest hit. To make it smart more

they have to undergo the humiliation of fumbling for money in front of their guests and in public. Some form of token system made available through the P.R.O. or library may be an answer.

Members of the committee might ask themselves how they overcome this problem when entertaining visitors. Most residents face this problem sooner or later.

For those who have been reluctant to pay admission, the presence of a donation box is like a red rag to a bull. To be an attendant at the Pukekura Park fernery is to indicate an above-average sense of diplomacy.

Would it be better to rely on a nominal charge for admission and encourage greater attendance, also repeated attendance? Season tickets may be an answer to some of the problem.

An advantage of high charges however, are the fact that they discourage attendance by the more destructive elements of our society and this is an important factor.

When it comes to conveying information to the visitor, be it directional, educational or historical, there is no finer way than to pass it on at the spot involved, and it is in this respect that improvements could be made. We do not 'sell' our park to visitors well enough but rely on them finding their own way with the result that the less inquisitive and the timorous often miss even the major features. The park is loaded with items of interest, quite apart from its scenic attraction and it would add a great element of adventure to a visit to the park if here and there one came upon some form of notice (not necessarily a white board) with such items as the history of the Poets Bridge, Cannon Hill, the Fernery etc., etc. This would be an opportunity for work in stone or some other material for architectural gems and items of permanence are lacking here. For example the history of Cannon Hill could be recorded in some form of shelter, not perched on the top or competing with the bandstand but facing over the fountain lake.

Another requirement is signposting. Some folk are quite capable of becoming lost in their own back yards and are beyond help but Pukekura Park is able to confuse even the most astute. As individuals familiar with the surroundings, we take a tremendous amount for granted but we must acknowledge the fact that there is an increasing number of visitors from other countries, even other countries, some with only limited time and we cannot expect them to know in advance what they are looking for and exactly where to find it. The forthcoming noticeboard will help to relieve this problem, but they are only part of the answer, for in a maze-like park such as this, they demand supplementary signposting. People will set off with a very definite objective in mind and will need help within 100 yards.

In considering signposting, one is torn between the practical requirement of the sign being obvious, yet not to such an extent that it destroys the aesthetic appeal of its surroundings. By use of natural materials both requirements can be met.

The topic of signposting leads into what could be one of the most exciting developments - the introduction of 'nature trails' in the park. This exploits the educational potential of the area and here again we could be leaders in New Zealand for a scheme which is operative in many other countries.

The park is laced with walks of beauty and interest and the objective is to reveal these in an adventurous manner, at the same time pinpointing items of historical or educational significance.

First essential would be to define the routes and identify them each from the others by some form of tagging (this would be valuable even without the supporting details as hereunder). Each trail would have a particular colour or identifying shape. Along this trail, features of interest are noted and recorded on a cyclostyled sheet which is made available to visitors at a small charge. Armed with this sheet, the participant sets off to follow the trail and find and observe the items indicated. A great deal of educational value can be incorporated, the idea requires no supervision, and the participant has freedom of time for the adventure. Trails of varying lengths and interest-range are compiled. This idea would add much greater point to the increasing number of visits from schools as well as offering visitors a unique adventure in pleasant surroundings.

Signposting should indicate distances to features of major interest. Visitors wish to know whether the Bowl is within walking distance of the Kiosk etc.

THE CHILDRENS PLAY AREA. This is well situated in or easily accessible part of the park, yet isolated such that it does not interfere with other activities.

It is recommended by areas which could be termed 'un-developed' but which hold great potential for extension of the playing area. The hollow between the playground and Victoria Gate, for instance could be formed into a very pleasant glade and this extended on around the sweep towards the waterfall adjoining Gilbert St. Walk. There is far more adventure in uneven areas and this development could add greatly to the interest in the area. It is a pity to see such a useful depression filled in. It may even be feasible to include in this amphitheatre some of the exciting animals as seen at Kowhai Park, Wanganui. These would certainly fit in well under the totakas at the northern edge to the playground and provide a wonderful jungle-like atmosphere.

The western slopes with grass and free-planting of liliium are greatly admired and this idea could be developed perhaps a little more, with attention to skyline and shelter trees along the crest.

The boundary formed by the water course holds great potential for development of water-associations and should be one of the first projects tackled in exploiting water effects, for it contains both turbulent and placid elements in an area visited by many.

I cannot help but feel that large stones are the answer to this development, for they would add an interest not found elsewhere in the

park and be practical in the two senses that their careful use would reduce maintenance and at the same time provide obstacles for children to hop about on and thus serve to protect material planted amongst them. Parts of the watercourse itself should be formed of boulders forming rapids, interspersed with shallow tranquil pools. The emission from the fountain lake lends itself to the provision of a waterfall visible from as far away as the childrens playground if a vista was opened up and pathways formed.

The area at the lower end of the watercourse where it falls from a chute presents quite a problem, both from a practical as well as an aesthetic viewpoint, yet the combination of cliff, water, pond, overhanging vegetation and winding path must surely have great potential. Perhaps the introduction of a hump-backed bridge, even of simple oriental fashion would take attention from the rather austere chute. No doubt this could be mellowed and camouflaged in various ways, including backing-up with some form of walling and the addition of some form of flume which would have more decorative value. Certainly the overhanging strawberry trees and winding path give this area a very distinctive character and being so accessible to the public, should be used to greater advantage. Not even courting couples are attracted there at present.

THE FOUNTAIN LAKE - A PLEA FOR VISTAS: Though greatly admired and certainly one of the finest in the country, our fountain is only half appreciated. Reason for suggesting this is that a feature such as a fountain should be a focal point at the end of a vista, even if it is only formed of buildings, as occurs in many cities. The life and activity of a fountain acts as a beckoning force and will draw interest from afar. A tree-lined vista is the perfect setting but at present this possibility has not been exploited.

Investigation reveals that without much effort, three very fine vistas radiating from the fountain could be opened up, all in different directions.

The first is from the N.E. looking down from the high ground behind the tractor shed. The vista is almost in existence at present, but needs the removal of light growth, but more important, it requires a pathway to be formed from the ticket box area (near the puriri) over the hill to Millis Street entrance. This rise already planted in kauris, would then provide a particularly pleasant alternative route into the park from Millis Street, but is only justified by virtue of the wonderful view it would afford of the fountain. For night-viewing the path would require lighting.

For the second vista, no paths would be required, only the clearance of secondary growth and trimming of rimu trees. The line of view is from the path which starts behind the band rotunda and skirts Cannon Hill. From a point where steps lead down from this path to the Hatchery Lawn, one could have a fine elevated view of the fountain along an avenue of rimus which grow on the path skirting

the fountain lake. The slopes leading down to this path from Cannon Hill would probably be best grassed and this would perhaps be a suitable area for naturalising plantings of daffodils.

The third vista would be the most spectacular of all and possesses scope for considerable development. It is prompted by the unique view of the fountain obtained for surveillance reasons from 25 Victoria Road.

At a point about a chain further to the north (towards New Plymouth) it would be possible to cut a vista down onto the fountain by simply topping secondary growth and removing a few branches (not cutting growth to the ground.) It would be easy to provide a viewing platform for this magnificent view which is only a few yards from Victoria Road and yet in a very little-used area of the park.

I think that vehicles should be kept from the major areas of the park at all costs, but it may be felt that for the elderly and infirm, plus increasing number of evening bus-trips, etc., justification could be found for introducing a short, single lane loop road to this vantage point. This could be easily provided by dropping a young totara and two pohutukawas and excavation of a short cutting in from Victoria Road, with use of the spoil to provide the viewing area. This loop would be about four chains long and would bring enjoyment of the fountain to a much greater audience. Provision could be made for a further donation box.

Introduction of added sources of interest should be encouraged along Victoria Road since it is an attractive entry to the Park and has ample parking facilities, yet is very little used.

HATCHERY LAWN AREA: I have previously recorded impressions as to how I feel this area could be developed in relation to water effects, but since then there has been an introduction which has prospects of attracting thousands of visitors to this area and justify special attention to the surroundings. The Christmas feature with nativity scene, carols and decorative lighting has such appeal that it will become a major annual event.

Upon first reflecting on the prospect of hundreds of people milling about in this area I thought that perhaps a stream cutting across and down one side would be undesirable, but second thoughts have revealed that provided it was simple and small in scale, it would provide a perfect setting.

In such an emotional atmosphere, a rope barrier is completely out of place but the presence of a stream and reflecting pool between the subject and the audience would constitute a barrier which in effect enhanced the setting. It would also add greater content and meaning to the waterfall which provides unobtrusive life to the scene.

During the holiday period when in future the illuminations for the nativity scene will presumably be retained, it would add continuity and greater interest if there was a string of coloured lights extending from the ticket box entry to the fountain lake,

along past the pump-house, on via the hatchery lawn and linking up with those circling the lake. It is astounding how many hundreds viewed the nativity scene and left, totally unaware of the illuminations around the main lake.

Consideration is being given to the provision of a sizeable waterfall and I feel that the most natural and aesthetically pleasing location would be cascading down the steep slope in the corner of the western hillside marked by the weeping elm and the giant rubber tree. This would bring interest deeper into the park and in this setting would enhance greatly the location of our major Christmas attraction.

Cannon Hill should remain what it has been for a century, a solitary, bold sentinel from whose summit one can see to every corner of the park. It should not be encumbered with frills but remain crowned with lofty giants as it is now, thus accentuating its presence. We should not be hesitant about planting large trees in such places for fear of what they will destroy upon removal, for within five years helicopters will be utilized for this purpose—after all, upon looking back, chain-saws were not evolved that many years ago. I foresee a time when it will be possible to stand on Cannon Hill and glance along vistas in many directions. If ever a site is chosen to commemorate the wisdom and forethought of those who have preserved this lovely park for posterity, it should be on Cannon Hill and thus serve as a focal point for the return view along such vistas.

May Cannon Hill remain simple yet bold.

THE MAIN LAKE AREA: At the risk of earning the nickname 'Vista Fuller' I wish to make a plea for the preservation of the one magnificent vista we already have got—the famed view of the mountain from the Kiosk area. Though it is perhaps not realised, we are gradually losing Mt. Egmont at the rate of hundreds of feet per year. The reason for this is the growth of the lawsons forming the boundary down the hill on Brooklands Road.

Unfortunately they are very bare low down and would not respond favourably to heavy cutting-back but at least they would tolerate topping by about 6 ft. Complete removal at this stage would not be advisable as the trees form the southern wind break. Thanks to extensive topping of surrounding trees last winter, the lawsons are the only remaining obstruction.

As a further safeguard, care should be taken that no tree likely to exceed 15ft. is ever planted on the mound where the line of view intersects Brooklands Road, i.e. adjoining the trees in question. Extension of the planting of maples already there would be excellent.

Standing beside the big redwood outside the Curators Office affords an excellent example of the value of a vista for viewing prominent features. From here, viewed along the corridor of trees, the mountain looks enormous—there is a closeness and an intimacy. Walk forward towards the Kiosk and into the open and it will be

and that incredibly enough the closer one gets, the more the mountain diminishes and the further away it seems!

Note also, incidentally that the view is completely ruined by the presence of a pathetic-looking telephone pole and twisted cable. Large vehicles have frequently bounced off the giant redwood as the scars denote, but not one has done the park the service of knocking down this unfortunately located pole. There must be another answer.

The complaint that our main lake area lacks colour appeal is somewhat justified, for apart from the flowering season of the azaleas, it tends to be rather drab. The presence of ducks and people, together with the particular nature of the area present quite a problem but efforts to exploit the relective qualities of colour should be persued, though the clarity of the water, leaves a lot to be desired in this respect. There is no doubt that the mamaku ferns will always remain the most appealing single feature in this area and special efforts should always be made to ensure their survival.

While still in the Kiosk area, we have a neglected little corner which has great potential, since it is a depression—the so-called sunken lawn.

Perhaps the first requirement here is to clean out all the unwanted growth around the rim, particularly on the bandstand side and plant low shrubs, etc., so that the view down is appealing. Removal of some over growing trees is desireable and more use should be made of the water by exposing it in some way and making its course attractive, either with stones or even diversion. This area is within view of practically everyone who visits the park and should be developed as a feature of special character. No doubt the use of walling is called for here.

#### THE FERNERY AREA:

In the face of present knowledge one could say that as far as the future is concerned, the fernery is well and truly doomed. No doubt ingenuity of the future will save the situation but it may be ingenuity of a form we are at present not prepared to accept.

Dug into a southern hillside and flanked very closely to east, north and west by evergreen trees with a life expectancy of a thousand years, it is the last place, in the country which one would choose as the site for the growing of the sophisticated range of plants which are expected to be grown to perfection.

The trees and the demands of the area are incompatible within the bounds of the economic resources available and any attempt at compromise is merely delaying the inevitable.

Already, the policy is to grow ever-increasing numbers of plants elsewhere and bring them in for display but within twenty years even this will not be a practical proposition and one questions the advisability of spending large sums of money in the area without giving consideration to the practical growing requirements.

To give the problem another aspect, it should be pointed out that

grow a wide range of plants successfully under existing ( and progressively deteriorating) conditions requires a special skill and should there be any change of staff, our standards could drop very sharply in a very short time.

The situation is precarious from whatever angle it is viewed and I feel that the time has come to take a realistic look at the hazards offered by the surrounding vegetation. In the balance on the one side is a group of trees now duplicated in numbers throughout the park and on the other the future of a display area unique throughout the world. The unseen factor, perhaps weighing the balance rather heavily, is the commemorative nature of the trees, but in all fairness, I don't really feel that Mr. Horton would wish to have it said in years to come that 'but for the presence of these trees commemorating the man who had so much to do with its construction, stood the most appreciated range of display houses in New Zealand.'

I record this all in reverence to the memory of Mr. Horton and as a great lover of our native flora. Both would be well served by re thinking over the future of the few trees in question.

Over the past five years there have been very impressive developments taking place in the fernery compound and these are continuing so there is no likelihood of stagnation while such interest prevails. I think it would be excellent to introduce the varied level circuit whereby visitors would return along the northern ends of the houses with the opportunity to look down into them. Beyond this, there is little development which can take place, for the area is almost 'built out'. One possibility however, is the replacement of the lower tool shed with a shade-house and perhaps a smaller toolshed attached. This corner is not at present utilised to best advantage.

Another urgent need, the replacement of the upper potting shed and reconstruction of bins, etc., will presumably go ahead in with the rebuilding of No. 4.

It would no doubt entice more folk in if outside the fernery they had some visual indication of what to expect and perhaps even a plan of the extent of the area. After all, to a visitor, it is a little bit like 'buying a pig in a poke', as they stand before this tunnel in the hillside.

It appears that about 20% of visitors attend outside the advertised hours thanks to the good graces of the attendants involved. Some form of advertising such as the cards used for the fountain timetable may be of advantage.

I think it would be wise policy to be able to offer a guide to organised parties notifying in advance. Though this principal is perhaps already operative within limits, if it was advertised it may attract more visitors and repay the expense involved.

With the introduction of the nativity scene, there is little doubt that over the Christmas period the night attendances at the



perhaps exceed those of the day. In this fact we have grounds of establishing a feature which could be not only outstandingly beautiful but also very profitable. New Plymouth has in one year gained a reputation for city illuminations equal to anything in New Zealand. If during the period from the Christmas holidays to the end of February the fernery were to be illuminated, we would attract people from every corner of the country.

During the presence of the nativity scene, the fernery (and the kiosk) could be open nightly thus providing a night of illuminations which folk would never forget. It would become a popular feature to drive around the city, view the churches, visit the nativity scene and fernery and relax at the kiosk.

After termination of the nativity scene, the fernery could be opened one night weekly until the end of February or for the duration of the Festival of the Pines. I forecast that people would find this attraction irresistible. Apparently in 1953-54 when the fernery was illuminated, there were something like 700 visitors on one evening!

This could be the greatest single factor in increasing the revenue from the fernery.

The 'Nature-Trail' idea on a smaller scale could be incorporated in a visit to the fernery and this could be a means of offering something tangible to the visitor for his or her payment.

In close proximity to the fernery is the Stainton Dell which offers many wonderful opportunities for development but first of all - how to get the people there? Of those visiting the fernery, only a few percent ever venture on the few steps into this area, therefore to improve its features and not advertise them would be a waste of time.

The die is already cast for the future of the Stainton Dell, for it has the shelter, the shade and the moisture ideal for the bog-garden type of feature already started. With landscaping and extension to the limits afforded by the surrounding slopes it could become an area of concentrated interest the year around and complement admirably, the attractions of the nearby fernery. This development should be one of the priorities.

Of perhaps greater urgency however, is the entry to the fernery area from the remainder of the park. This major attraction is entered through a back yard which includes a gents toilet on the one side and a car park on the other. Nothing of interest can be seen beyond these and it is taxing peoples credibility to expect them to assume that our major attraction lays beyond. It looks like a dead end and must remain so in the minds of the less enquiring.

Without disturbing the rimus, this area between the kiosk and the fernery requires a major clean-out, including removal of the pukateas and re-siting of the compost bins.

We must 'sell' our fernery more effectively and not expect people to have to hunt so intensively in unfamiliar surroundings or oblige them to pass closely to what can only be described as a rather sinister looking toilet.

The foregoing observations should not be interpreted as criticism of the efforts of those involved in past development and maintenance. The park stands as a greatly admired tribute to their endeavours and it is for us to ensure that the features they have preserved are perpetuated, but at the same time brought into line with present day and possible future demands.

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NEW PLYMOUTH.

GMF/lmm.