

Donkey Serenade

Newsletter No 30

August, 2020



Greetings, like you we are glad we live in NZ and all that it offers in these troubled times. In our Community we have enjoyed a most successful year with the donkeys and the Park. We still say thanks to the original generosity and fulfilment of Ted & Alison Robert's dream to donate the land with the hope of keeping the donkeys on the paddocks for all the Community to enjoy.

The Reserve and animals are looking great - thanks to the work of many local Volunteers - week after week of it. I hope we never take for granted their efforts.

To keep the dream alive, The Highfield Donkeys Inc Society is holding its AGM - as per the notice below. I am reminded that the donkeys at Highfield continue to live there because a group of people - family and locals plus others who, when Alison died, took ownership of the donkeys, with help from Auckland Council. The years have quickly passed and now it's time for some of the Donkey Inc Committee to stand down and others to replace them and carry on the dream. The Committee work is not onerous. The Donkey Managers and Groomers take care of the physical needs of the animals. If you have a desire for the donkeys to continue at Highfield and could give a small amount of time for the Committee work, you would be warmly welcomed on board.

Please phone **Peter: 021168 9698 or Shona 425-6129** for further information. The more locals involved with the Society the better off the Donkeys and the Park will be.

Shona Duncan

Donkey Bray....The Donkeys have come through the drought of January, February, March and April, as well as the lockdown in fine fettle.

Grass growth was minimal over this period and I fed trimmings of coprosma and began feeding hay out in April, a month earlier than normal. I treated abscesses in the hooves of Tara and Tina, which is unusual in dry weather. All the Donkeys have been drenched and their hooves trimmed by our farrier.

Over the fence in the orchard and bush block above the road dam, steady work is in progress at our Tuesday Working Bees. The boardwalk has resumed construction - under the guidance of our supremo chippie Allan.. Piles have been driven in, our thanks to Bob Waata, and the joists are on site ready to be laid. Auckland Council supplied 200 native plants and trees. These were planted in the orchard and bush blocks. Also three new fruit trees were donated, Monte Surprise and Pease Good Nonsuch apples, plus a Satsuma plum.

We **welcome** Len, Dave and Lesley to our 'heavy lifters' group and Clare to the donkeys.

Peter Caccia-Birch

Highfield Donkeys Incorporated Society - A G M
2:00pm - Monday 17th August, 2020.

Betty Paxton Room Snells Beach Community Centre.
All welcome - Afternoon Tea provided.

Direct Credit Bank Details: ASB 12-3095 0254516 00 for membership fees
Please ensure you reference the bank details with your name and telephone number.

Many new residents in our Community, would be unaware of the history of Highfield and the Donkeys. Alison and Ted could have sold the land and used the funds for themselves and their families. However, their love of the land and their compassionate spirit has been to our Community's benefit. Two people who knew Alison & Ted have written below, I publish their thoughts for your interest and information. Their writings were included in the Time Capsule that was buried in the Park.

...I remember Alison Roberts as a humble, wise and generous lady who was passionate about her donkeys, her garden and also education. Her home as I recall, was a simple railway worker's cottage which had been moved onto the site. She was always enthusiastic when my young children visited and explored and even - unbeknown to me - swam in her pond after collecting tadpoles and sometimes goldfish. When I apologised about the goldfish she thought it was just great that they were so interested and said they were welcome anytime.

Once she telephoned me to say, "they're mounting up, they're mounting up!" I was confused at first, thinking she meant the donkeys, but she was offering me the donkey droppings from all along and under a hedge, she wanted me to have the 'doos' for my vegetable garden.

In later years her husband Ted suffered a stroke and was bedridden. Alison cared for him devotedly, but he was always restless at night, reliving wartime memories and trying to get out of bed. Alison desperately needed to catch up on her sleep. I was a District Nurse at the time. The DHB paid for me to do night duty, once a week and Alison would sleep outside in her small caravan.

I remember watching the rabbits out playing on the grass in the early hours of the morning. Ted was a perfect gentleman and though he didn't know who I was, he would tell me "You're a beautiful woman" and there are desperate men out there" he would warn me.....I would reassure him that I would "stay on watch, and that he could go off duty now".

Years later, while walking in the Te Kapa Cemetery, I came across a small insignificant wooden cross marking Alison's grave. I stood there amongst the more elaborate graves and headstones. I couldn't help thinking it was exactly how she would have wanted it. She was an unpretentious person and would not shout her innate kindnesses from the rooftops but liked to stay in the background.

What a wonderful legacy they have both left to this Community. She would be delighted that the donkeys and their progeny still give so much pleasure to the children of today, and also grateful to the hardworking volunteers who give their time to maintain Highfield for all to enjoy.

Joan Oakwood.

November, 2019

.....I have taken care of the Highfield Donkeys veterinary needs since 1985. In the course of many visits, donkey related and purely social drank many cups of tea with Alison.

During one of these 'cuppas', Alison was talking of her daughter who lived on the East Coast of Canada, and whom she had not seen for many years, and did not expect to. She went very quiet for a few minutes and then the conversation resumed. As Alison had recently completed the gifting of their land, Highfield to the people, I thought it appropriate that the people gave Alison a gift. An approach to the Mayor of the day produced a grand example of political diving for cover with the excuse that a precedent would be set if the Rodney Council made a gift, however, he did point me to Snell's Beach's very own Councillor, Betty Paxton, who immediately took up the cause and organised a fund raising dance selling tickets to fly Kathy home to visit her mum. Alison knew nothing of this until they met at the dance. A fantastic 'thank you and Community effort'.

Sometime, a few years later, and after Alison died, we used the last of the funds raised for the visit to source the big rock from the Omaha Quarry and had the plaque made and set in the Reserve in honour of Alison and Ted and their generous gift.



The Rock, being used as the centre piece for our President, Peter Couling, to farewell Alan Norton. Alan was our inaugural Secretary, he wrote our initial Newsletters, as well he completed all the paper work to set up Highfield Donkeys Inc Society, and put everything on such a sound footing with Auckland Council.

Ross Lynch

Veterinarian
1985-2010