

DONKEY SERENADE

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Peter Caccia-Birch receiving his QSM award from Governor-General, Dame Cindy Kiro.

Celebration of Peter Caccia-Birch's QSM Award and Volunteer's Efforts

On the 4th June 2022, an event was held at the Snells Beach Bowling Club to celebrate the award to Peter Caccia-Birch receiving the Queens Service Medal for his efforts in the setting up and expanding of the Highfield Donkeys Inc., Te Whau walkway, and the Highfield Advisory Committee. The celebration included work over the past 15 years and thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers.

Jane Kelsey, Chair of the Highfield Donkeys Inc., introduced the speakers; the first was Alan Norton, who now lives in Motueka. Alan described how he had in 2003, written to the Council about the reserve and then found himself on the Highfield Advisory Committee as Chairman. A result he decided was borne out of his ability to speak endlessly.

He met Peter Caccia-Birch who was also on the Committee and soon realised that Peter had tremendous flair and vision. Alan as a frequent

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visitor to Highfield Reserve, had established a good relationship with Alison Roberts whom he described as a special person. The Roberts had long wanted to leave the land to New Zealand, together with the donkeys. On Alison's death, the requirement to look after the donkeys became more urgent.

Together Alan and Peter negotiated with the Rodney Council and subsequently with the Auckland Council, to come to a memorandum of understanding and eventually in 2010, the Highfield Donkeys Inc. was created. **Cont. on page 2.**

Celebration Cont.

Jane Kelsey then read out a message from Beth Houlbrooke, Local Board Councillor, who was unable to attend. She commended the volunteers and Peter Caccia-Birch for enabling a strong local community and people connection. She commended the establishment of the donkey reserve in creating an attraction for local people and from further afield.

Peter Caccia-Birch then gave a speech thanking everyone who had contributed. He stated although he had a vision of what the reserve could become,



Peter's QSM Medal - Front and back.



L-R: Shona Duncan, Maxine Vitali, Lorraine Brown, Marion Jones.



L-R: Alan Ford, Len Miller and Steve Luketina.



L-R: Jane Kelsey, Marion Jones, Jenny van der Mespel, John Montgomery and Terry Norris.



Alan Norton; ex Chairman of the Highfield Reserve Advisory Committee.

he could not have achieved the positive outcome of the reserve without the help of all the volunteers. He stated that the task was comparatively easy compared to the other roles he had performed in the past.

Peter thanked Chris Burgess, who for many years was Auckland Council's Parks Manager, and Steve Luketina, ex Auckland Council; now on the Advisory Committee, and oversees work in Highfield's orchard. He praised Alan Norton for the help with the paperwork when Auckland Council took over from the Rodney Council. He thanked the new people and volunteers for committee work as well as the volunteers who maintained the grounds and groomed the donkeys. **Cont. on page 3.**

Celebration Cont.

Peter went on to say he hoped in the future that if East Mahurangi became a 'Whangaparaoa', that the Highfield Garden Reserve with the donkeys, would be an oasis of specimen trees and shrubs.

Peter was then presented with a kauri tree and a wooden plaque to go to be planted and erected in the reserve.



Peter standing beside the kauri tree planted in his honour.



Steve Cleverly presenting Peter with his plaque.



The plaque sits in front of the kauri tree.

Volunteers needed

June 19-25th celebrated National Volunteers Week. We appreciate each and every one of volunteers. We're always on the look out for extra hands, and people with gardening expertise. Please contact Peter on 021 168 9698 if you would like to join our Working Bee on a Tuesday morning at 9am for 1-2 hours.



Volunteer Focus:

Lou Bartlett



Many of you may have wondered about who is behind the metamorphosis of the Donkey Serenade and the Donkeys at Highfield Facebook page. We interviewed her recently.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I was born in Yeovil, Somerset in England.

Q. Tell us a bit about your family

A. I've been married to Tom 12 years (together 19 years) and we have two children, both girls, 7 & 9 years old and a black LabX called Beau.

Q. Working and what is your occupation?

A. I work for Harbour Sport as a Community Strength & Balance Trainer. The programme I work for is an ACC and Ministry of Health initiative, called 'Live Stronger', which works to reduce falls and injuries from falls in older adults. Community exercise classes and initiatives that aim to improve strength and balance, is an area I'm very passionate about.

Q. When did you come to New Zealand?

A. I came out to NZ with my husband in 2008 for 1 year. 14 years later...

Q. How long have you lived in Snells Beach?

A. Two years living in Snells Beach, having previously owned a caravan at Sandspit Holiday Park for several years.

Q. Why did you decide to join the Highfield Donkeys Inc.?

A. I was new to the area, working part-time and wanting to meet locals and get involved with some kind of community volunteer work, having previously volunteered for Age Concern. The Highfield Garden Reserve is a stone's throw from my home and I love taking my kids to feed the donkeys as well as always taking any visitors up there. I would always admire how the donkeys, gardens and orchards were consistently

so well cared for. I was walking my dog at Highfield and I saw they were looking for volunteers so I decided to message Peter Caccia-Birch. I immediately started attending the Tuesday morning working bees, at first helping groom the donkeys and then working in the gardens.

We have a great team of volunteers, held together by our great leader, Peter. I look forward to spending time outdoors amongst nature and learning lots about native trees and plants - as well as having a good old natter with a bunch of genuine and kind locals!

One day Peter invited me along to one of the Donkeys Inc. Committee meetings and I was asked to set up a new Facebook page to raise the profile of Highfield. Now as Communications Co-ordinator, I look after our social media and design and layout of Donkey Serenade. Before I retrained in the Sports & Exercise industry, I was a Graphic Designer for almost 17 years so design and marketing is in my blood.

Q. How many hours do you give to Highfield Donkeys Inc.?

A. I volunteer for an hour or so at the working bee every few weeks. The newsletter typically takes 2-3 days to pull together every few months as well as time attending committee meetings every 2 months and regularly keeping our Facebook page up to date.

Cont. on page 5.



Lou with Truffle.

"I would always admire how well the donkeys, gardens and orchards were consistently so well cared for."

Volunteer Focus. Cont.**Q. How do you see Highfield Garden Reserve progressing in the future?**

A. The future of Highfield is very bright. That's really down to the commitment of its members who all volunteer their time and energy into looking after and caring for those seven precious donkeys and the reserve, both of which are local treasures, and striving to keep things going for future generations. We need more people to come on board that will share and continue our vision and can also add to and enrich our pool of expertise. It would also be good to see more young people wanting to get involved. We are

exploring ideas into how we can involve children, aside from our donkey days.

Q. What has been the most amusing anecdote from your time with the Highfield Working Bee?

A. Turning up for work one week and being confronted with a dead possum hanging from the shed. Like it was the most natural thing in the world - no-one else batted an eyelid! I'm not very good with dead animals.. or wetas. Peter is a bit obsessed with wetas; we have several 'weta hotels' at Highfield which freak me out a little. Donkeys are definitely my favourite animals at Highfield!

Donkey cards for sale

Donkey cards (courtesy of Lorraine Brown of Algies Bay), are now available for purchase at the Mahurangi East Library, Snells Beach, Information site in Warkworth and the Craft Shop at Matakana Country Park.

They are \$5 each and all profits go to the Highfield Donkeys Inc.

The Library recently had an order from as far away as Perth, Western Australia.



Photo courtesy of Mahurangi East Library.

The do's and don'ts of feeding donkeys

Donkeys are herbivores and eat small amounts slowly and continuously browse and graze. Hay should be fed during the winter when there is little goodness in the grass. A salt/mineral block should also made available.

It's ok to feed our donkeys certain veggies. **Do** feed carrots, apples and silverbeet. Cut carrots and apples into smaller pieces to avoid choking.

Do not feed donkeys: feed intended for other animals, bread, cake, wheat or meat.



Sourced from 'What To Feed Your Donkey' – Donkey and Mule Protection Trust NZ.



For all the latest news and up to date information, please follow us at: facebook.com/donkeyshighfield