

# Summary of the Dominion Flats Journey.

Text to accompany graphics presentation. Helen Bibby  
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You may know that Waimea Estuary is the largest enclosed estuary in South Island and a survey done in 1993 showed 41 fish species and 50 different water birds inhabited the estuary and the Dominion Stream is known to be an important feeder into Waimea Estuary.

As you probably also know Mapua means “abundant” and specially refers to the fruiting stage of the kahikatea trees, most of which were felled by early settlers to get grazing land -and for the timber which were the priorities at that time, as settlers were trying to make a living.

Then in preparation for the Ruby Bay Bypass, the Crown obtained 11.3047 hectares at 28 Dominion Rd under the Public Works Act which, at that stage was a rural property used for grazing, near the head of the North west corner of the Waimea Estuary.

In 1989 DOC prepared a report about the effect on native habitat and wildlife in regard to a proposed bypass and, before construction began, studies of the streams showed good values of native fish species including giant kokopu and longfin eel which were nationally considered at risk. These fish were removed before work began.

Construction on the bypass started in 2008 and the highway was then built on a fill embankment which bisected the acquired land.

To do this the ground was significantly altered. The Chaytor Stream was diverted through a culvert under the highway and joined the Dominion Stream which was channelled through a concrete culvert also under the new highway and large areas of land were covered with clay spoil. When NZTA were finished building the highway they were left with a parcel of land superfluous to their needs.

This was when the real work began.

Huge preparation work and investigations were done by Elspeth Collier and David Mitchell on behalf of the MDCA including getting Tom Kroos and Michael North to each prepare in-depth studies of the streams and ecological values of the area for the MDCA. 8 species of native fish were found in the streams.

Then in Nov 2009 a meeting between NZTA, TDC, DOC, iwi, and the community was convened to discuss possibilities to protect the natural aspects of the area, and a proposal was sent from the MDCA to TDC asking them to acquire the area for reserve purposes.

In mid 2010 this was achieved, some as riparian land alongside the streams, some as cycleway, as the Great Taste Trail was originally intended to be routed through here, but later changed its route to where the Great Taste Trail now goes, and some additional land to make up the whole.

The bypass was opened in 2011 and NZTA were responsible for an initial planting against the road which now looks to be part of the whole reserve.

TDC then sold a small parcel of land within the reserve to help offset the cost of the project – The buyer of that land actually moved a house onto the section which has since been resold and that is where Rory now has his buses. Behind this section there is a strip of land with a track running along it that is also part of the reserve.

To begin with TDC did some gorse, broom and blackberry spraying to prepare the land.

In 2013 Nelmac had a planting project that didn't eventuate, so they offered the plants to TDC who in turn asked if we were keen to start and this was the start of our planting programme – 10 years ago.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013 90 people of all ages and abilities from Motueka through to Nelson and of course many from Mapua answered the call and came armed with spades and enthusiasm.

We were initially given 5000 plants then another 5000 so it was a very busy weekend that was almost too big to handle. Then these plants all had to be found amongst the long grass and covers put on – quite an undertaking.

The tracks were started with Beryl Wilkes and Nev Bibby cutting with their lawnmowers and weed eaters and we were planning as we went. We wanted the tracks to be interesting which I think they are. TDC helped with manpower

for a lot of the work. The clear areas by the picnic tables and at the entrance to the reserve are still cut regularly by a volunteer with his lawn mower.

A local offered, what turned out to be, a very heavy picnic table they no longer had use for so this was carried down the track with frequent stops for a breather and now sits in the cleared area by the stream. The other tables and seats were made by Jim Hosie one of our regular volunteers with money donated for materials from Heather Hoad's Community Shop in Motueka.

We divided the area into 15 workable blocks to make it more manageable as you can see by the numbered discs beside the track as you go through.

DOC trainees from NMIT put in 6 boardwalk bridges with material supplied by TDC. They certainly got first hand experience as they were up to their knees in mud in some places and they worked hard.

Community members made 2 more bridges overseen by nearby resident Andy Palmer of TerraFirma Engineering then a third was built more recently by more volunteers.

Volunteers – a word that comes up frequently in this summary, volunteers including quite a few school kids, put down the netting on the bridges to make them safe in the wet and the frosts.

The Scouts had several planting sessions planting flaxes some of which were pulled out by pukeko overnight and had to be replanted the next day by volunteers.

We approached the Mapua School to see if they were interested in painting murals in the underpass and pupils from senior classes drew pictures in class, voted to choose which would be used, scaled them up then painted the 2 ends of the underpass that goes through to Dominion Rd –a good exercise that used all sorts of different learning skills. While some painted, others helped with weeding so some environmental learning as well. We then coated the drawings with anti-graffiti paint to try and avoid any extra adornment. Adult volunteers had also put an undercoat layer on beforehand. The following year the school children did further painting that goes the length of one side of the underpass.

Waimea Intermediate students held a workday, planting trees in the reserve which they followed by giving over \$630 which was the takings from their next mufti day. This money of course went towards buying more plants.

So many different people lent a hand -Jonathon Kennett -a well-known cycling guru from Wellington -passing through one day, stopped to chat, then a few months later came through with a group of cycling friends and put in a solid morning of planting before they headed on to Golden Bay.

Crombie Lockwood from Richmond put in “work in the community sessions” planting trees early on. Treescapes donated mulch.

Lower Moutere School / Whenua Iti /Mapua School pupils/students from English Learning Academy in Nelson /the GeoCache Group /the Richmond Walkers / the Mapua Womens Walkers have all contributed time and energy into weeding or planting sessions.

We were told that plants needed to be locally sourced so plants were purchased from Titoki Nurseries, Westbank Nurseries, or were from donations from locals, the iwi in Motueka, and local businesses and we received funding for several thousand trees from the national Billion Trees programme through the Tasman Environmental Trust in 2020.

The iwi in Motueka offered manuka plants which were going to be wasted and which looked well past outgrowing their pots and needed a home, so we took trailers - roped in willing /or not so willing helpers, got the plants into the ground not really sure how many would survive as they were not looking wonderful, but we were really surprised with the success rate that eventuated.

We were nominated for a TrustPower Award - and were the regional winner for the Environmental Award in 2018. Alongside the award, which we were very proud to receive, we also got \$1000 which, of course, was spent on more plants.

Over the years we have received more than \$90,000 in grants from many organisations like Pub Charities, Network Tasman, and many others with Rata being the largest donor. This meant many hours at the computer writing pleading letters and not all successful either. I have lost count of plant numbers but it will be well excess of 80,000. We have planted flax, cabbage trees, manuka, kanuka, matai, rimu, beech, kahikatea, nikau, miro, totara, titoki, maire, and many others all of which would have been in the original forest.

We were given gravel from road sweepings which we then manually put on to the tracks. Quite an undertaking as we had to get it from the reserve entrance to increasingly further up the track. Big thanks go to the neighbour who lent

his rhino for us to use for the job of moving it up the track. We then had to spread the gravel which attracted abuse from a cycling group who complained about the gravel as they cycled through, and we sweated away in the hot sun – I think they thought we were PD workers – of the retirement age!

We decided we needed some information boards so we put our ideas together and took them to Jane Smith of Chocolate Dog who made them look professional. Another job for the volunteers to get them printed in Richmond, transported to Mapua then securely planted in the ground.

Pukekos were a real pest to begin with as they pulled out plants unless the plants were covered. Hares were a nuisance too when plants were more exposed as they too objected to new things in their territory and pulled out plants – not to eat – just to get them out of their space. We do have some rabbits but very few.

We have a series of traps through the reserve and trapping is run by yet another volunteer who has quite a tally of stoats, rats, weasels, and hedgehogs and he still gets results each time the traps are cleared.

We still have pukeko maybe not as many as there were, as the open wet areas are not so visible for them. There are fantails, tui, blackbirds, skylarks, chaffinch, silvereyes, bellbirds, greenfinch, a pair of kingfishers have a nest hole in an old tree stump each year, some resident weka, a very occasional visit from keruru, and we see paradise ducks and mallard ducks on the streams on occasion.

Skinks are found often now, and we recently saw a weka running across Mapua Drive with one in its beak.

There are definitely fish in the streams too with a count being done in 2018.

TDC have been very easy overseers and have let us make a lot of the decisions when needed, then giving their stamp of approval. We have had easy communication and prompt replies to queries whenever we have requested information. They have funded materials for projects, and have provided plants. Ash Oliver's firm and Nelmac have both done contract work for TDC for some of the heavier work like track forming and bigger weed control.

The TDC have also recently conducted a review of reserves in this area and we are very pleased to know that Dominion Flats has been designated as a scenic

reserve category B which means it is protected from being sold or built on in the future so all the hard work will not be in vain.

I have to mention the volunteers again / those that have come to our many planting days, those that have helped build bridges/ spread gravel/ pulled out old fencing, lent equipment, collected plants , got rid of rubbish and all the other jobs that volunteers do when needed -- and of course the wonderful, very few, regulars who have come (and still do) almost every week to do what's needed.

Truly this is a community project and now look what we have achieved.

Well done everyone. Nga Mihi Nui.