
Return Address:

Friends of Ben Rudd's Newsletter, No 4

(Stamp)

16 June 2000

- Welcome to the fourth Friends of Ben Rudds Newsletter. This issue brings you up-to-date with activities so far.
- With this mail-out, there may be a small, personal reminder for you if you haven't paid this year's subscription. As you now know, the subs year is the calendar year. Your money helps a lot with the necessary activities we are carrying out, to turn the property into one we can be proud to visit and enjoy. It is great to feel that we are a part of such an enthusiastic, positive project, with a sense of both history and future. We are working today for the future users of Flagstaff, while celebrating our colourful past.
- Donations are always welcome! Subs are \$5 per year per membership. Membership can be individual, family or club. Please send your money to the above address. Remember, if there is anyone you know of who might be keen to join the Friends of Ben Rudds, please let them know about us, what we do, and how we can be supported.
- With this newsletter, we welcome seven new Friends: Alistair McDonald, John Cox, Edith Mercier, Mary Miller, Judy Russell, Greg Powell and Eric Callaghan, all of Dunedin.

"RECENT" ORGANISED EVENTS (-last millennium, actually)

- Our second attempt at a picnic was on Sunday 14 November. The weather was just great and a small gathering welcomed the sunshine and conviviality. We investigated the work requirements for the hut, and read out a letter from Marie McDonald, full of reminiscences and suggestions. Thanks, Marie, it was a big shame you couldn't attend in person. The OTMC day trip arrived via Spiers Road, visited Bruce Campbell's rhodo dell, then descended via the Davies Track. Everyone enjoyed their Ben Rudds day.
 - The Christmas tree pruning/harvest/collection day on 11 December went well, with a small crew taking off plenty of trees. The culling of the trees is necessary to ensure native vegetation gets the best chance of regenerating. We could have supplied a larger number of Douglas firs for Friends to purchase. Maybe many of you no longer need Christmas trees, or have alternative sources?
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Ken's report:

Ken Mason has been through a bit of turmoil of late, and is only now getting on top of things. He's even been on top of our hill. There is no formal Project Officer's report this month, but he would like the following to be made known:

- Many big and small pines have now been removed: in particular on the Jim Freeman Track. This provides an opportunity for the track to be realigned. See thank you message below.
- There is now a heavy-duty seat at a look-out lower down the track. Below the Rhododendron Dell, where a bunch of Douglas firs was felled, there is an open space with a good view westwards. Ken and Pete made the effort and now they and anyone climbing the track can take a well-earned rest on this bullet-proof seat. From what Ken says, it sounds like it would survive a cyclone! There is a possibility of another big seat of similar permanence up under the Silver beech behind the shelter.
- Broom infestation: the most serious area is above the firebreak, in the vicinity of the skidsite. It may need some carefully-targeted herbicide use. There is probably enough broom on Flagstaff to allow the full establishment of the bio-control bugs (twig miner) that are up there, so the loss of a few broom bushes to herbicide should not hamper the bugs' progress. All speed, little fellas!
- The Silver beech planted by big OTMC work parties in the early 1990s is doing well, despite some pig damage. Ken has been growing more on, and has a good number ready for planting out. Some of these have been bought by Forest & Bird. Ken also has grown on a number of local-sourced snow tussocks for the area above the skid site. Jimmy Fife and the kids of the Kiwi Conservation Corps (KCC) are to do some planting out in that area. This is the area that needs the big effort.
- Some track and boundary marker signs have, inevitably, been destroyed. They are cheap, however, so can be readily replaced. The flimsier they are, the less attractive they appear to be to vandals. They persisted for a reasonable period, before disappearing.

Something to look forward to: 17 September Planting Day: Contact Peter Mason, Phone 455 7074

Ken's local-sourced silver beech is to be planted, with snowtussock and some celmisia. These need cunning planting amongst large logs to protect them from pig damage. Small but dedicated teams are hoped for, to undertake this interesting and pleasant job. The landowners (OTMC) have this day listed on their trip programme, so we could see a bit of interest, and a social occasion should ensue. (Actually, it'll be good to see the Lords of the Manor mingling with the estate management teams!!!)

A Report from Peter Mason

On 4 May I met with David Pearson of Plantation Management Services on-site at Ben Rudds to look at the milling potential of the remaining forestry stands on the North Eastern boundary of the property.

The two blocks surveyed were the larches (planted 1968) and a remnant block of Douglas fir (planted 1971) which had survived the Flagstaff fire in 1976. The larches are in good form (at 32 years old) but, to attain full millable potential, would need at least another 20 years growth. The Douglas fir are also in good form, but will require moderate thinning to allow for full canopy development over the next 20-25 years. The long-term dollar net return (in today's monies) from these two blocks of trees would easily double the return from our first harvest of radiata in 1990. A report prepared by David will be discussed at the next Trust meeting, along with all the pros and cons of such forestry management.

I took the opportunity to show a very interested David the current restoration projects, ie beech plantings and wilding tree removal. He has quite a knowledge of the property from when he worked with MAF and had liaised with the OTMC during 1989-90. David and I then discussed the potential of having a field day later this year on-site for the Mid Otago Farm Forestry Assn, for which we are both active members) to demonstrate the revegetation processes and role of the former forestry blocks. ----- Pete M.

Avoiding importing new weeds:

Many of you may have seen Kelvin Lloyd's article "*What can we do about weeds?*" in the May 2000 FMC Bulletin. He stresses the importance of cleaning mud off boots, clothes and implements, when going into precious environments. It is so easy to bring new weeds into a place like Ben Rudds. Any vehicle on the road will potentially carry gorse and broom seeds, and move infestations along. I was amazed to see all the sheep sorrel growing in the old plantation site, and must say I haven't seen it growing like that in many other natural areas. It really detracts from the natural look of the undergrowth. I have seen no introduced oxalis species up there yet. That gardeners' scourge is so easily spread and so difficult to get rid of! Let's be very careful that no such weeds are inadvertently introduced to the Ben Rudds property. Oxalis, for instance, has turned up in some potting mix. It is a real danger that can be easily avoided by careful observation. Plants grown in infected potting mix need repotting and watched for some months.

Thank you messages

- Thanks to the XY Tramping Club for the water tank suggestion. Having discussed this, however, the Trust believes it would simply become a target for vandalism. The more senior Friends will no doubt remember the past record of vandalism, and the demise of the last little hut that was unable to withstand determined attacks despite its steel cladding! The Trust would like to ensure visitors are aware of the two water holes. We will re-mark the track to the lower one as soon as Freeman's Track work has gone beyond it. While the upper water hole can go dry in extra-dry seasons, we have never known the lower one, which is flowing, to let us down.
- Thanks to Dick Brasier and Geoff Jackson for recent work on the hut. This work should ensure a few more decades of life!
- Thanks to Dave McFarlane (with Graeme Loh, and other Forest & Bird colleagues) who have made huge inroads into ridding us of embarrassing foreign trees (planted and wilding) over much of the property. Good training for attacking the rest of Otago, eh guys!
- Thanks to Forest & Bird for buying the above-mentioned local-sourced trees for use on the property and on the rest of Flagstaff.

WANTED: GENETIC ENGINEER FOR HELP WITH THE LATEST BEN RUDD'S REVEGETATION INITIATIVE.

We have no doubt that, among our thriving membership, there is someone who is, or knows, a Genetic Engineer, who is happy to contribute his or her expertise voluntarily. Help is needed with our latest project, which is to work on locally-sourced snowtussock and silver beech. The objective is to insert genes into these plants to achieve the following traits:

- broom and/or gorse genes to be inserted to ensure these desirable natives cover the property completely with little effort from us;
- a touch of herbicide-resistance would be the next step, because we need the *real* broom and gorse (and pines) to go down; and
- the development of simultaneous high palatability *and* fatal toxicity, to possums, pigs and hares.

How about it, people? That should do the job nicely, and we could all relax. It shouldn't be too hard... -anything's possible these days.

Please contact me if you have any contributions, advice, suggestions, etc for these newsletters. I can be emailed at richard.pettinger@orc.govt.nz, or phoned at (03) 487 9488. - Richard P.

• Thanks to all the many folk who have donated time and/or money... too many to mention individually.
