



Friends of Ben Rudd's Newsletter, No 2-2

(Stamp)

6th July 2020

Welcome to the new Friends of Ben Rudd's Newsletter. It is the second Edition for the second Trust. This issue lets you know about the tree planting and other amazing progress your Trust has made in the last year.

Beech tree planting: With regard to our planting programme of local-sourced Silver beech trees, your Trust has made significant progress. From April 2019 when Sue Williams' work party planted 30 trees on the western side of the Firebreak, Richard and Tracy P planted 5 more on the Simes' Beech Walk (SBW), this time with beech leaf litter in the mix. Later in the year a large number of holes were dug, then, in May 2020, as the Covid-19 level allowed, three bubble groups planted 88 trees along the western side of the Firebreak, and 32 were planted by the track to the Shelter. "Trees That Count" (TTC) kindly funded 100 of these trees. When planting trees during the alert levels, birdlife was noticeably louder, closer and more varied than at any other time, before or since. Sue saw a fernbird at close quarters.

An avenue of beech is an experiment to try to overtop gorse and broom, on the lower side of the Firebreak, along the shelter and SBW tracks. This experiment is supported by QEII Trust, the DCC, and TTC to see if canopy closure can be achieved and the pest plants suppressed rather than going back for years with repeated herbicide use. Any beech branches extending too near the road can be trimmed to promote bushing-up of vegetation to shade out broom and gorse. Any advice, observations or assistance with such experiments would be highly appreciated.

Possoms: High Country Contracting (HCC) in a report for 22 July-5 August 2019 stated 29 traps on our land caught 194 possums. In all the land from the Bullring to Swampy, 570 traps were set, catching 650 possums. In May through to mid July 2020 HCC are trapping again and plan a programme for May - July 2021. We are expecting a report soon, that so far looks promising: many more possums, rats and even two pigs have been trapped this season. Counters on our own 3 A24 GoodNature traps, deployed since May 2019, funded by Ron and Sarah Keen and an auction of their donated goods, indicate the number of animals caught: 10 stoats and 4 rats. HCC asks that we don't disturb traps or even possums themselves (dead or alive), as it could affect monitoring the progress of the control effort.

Friends, please do not carry out work on the property without letting a Trust member know in advance. This may allow us to work with you, and stop us from planning work you've already done.

Other pests: The Trust asked the DCC Biodiversity fund if we could get more traps, but we were turned down. It was considered a pointless gesture if a neighbour didn't complement our efforts. We want to do our very best for the noble "Orokonui Halo" effort and, for some Trustees and OTMC members trapping pests elsewhere is a better use of volunteer effort. One of our neighbours, the DCC Scenic Reserve team, is implementing a 2018 Wildlands "*Ecological Assessment...*" report's recommendations, including as we've said before in the 2019 Friends' Newsletter, on our grassland above the Firebreak. As also we mentioned earlier, we all need to consider a "good neighbour" approach in the *Regional Pest Management Plan for Otago* (now operative and enforceable).

Broom Gall Mite bio-control: Broom Gall Mites were released in autumn 2019, as a trial for the Otago Regional Council (ORC), at several locations on our land. To date, however, no definitive mite transfer or activity has been observed there. If the gall mite is a safe potential suppressor of broom vigour, and less destructive to what's precious than the latest formulation of Tordon, let's try to assist these little friends. The ORC offered to provide fresh mites for release in the coming spring and other seasons to determine their success or otherwise. ORC advice suggests the mites are present in much of Otago, but their movement and establishment are quite unpredictable. In some of Otago, broom is observed to be in Big Trouble due to the mites, but there is no sign of harm here (nor, we happily note, to the native brooms in Richard & Tracy P's garden).

Drone survey of vegetation: You may recall how the DCC Biodiversity team is funding this trial of a new method to help manage our land. Graham McArthur's drone flights to date have indicated this should be a very useful aid for locating, identifying and control of unwanted noxious flora. A recent flight of three passes under a pre-determined grid covered most of the property, in a flight plan that can be replicated in different seasons for monitoring vegetation trends. The drone could scan around a third of the land only, on one rechargeable battery. Graham now has three batteries, so all we need is one suitable day.

So, as we hoped, thrashing on foot in the hope of spotting rowans, pines, blackberry, Himalayan honeysuckle, firs, sycamores, gorse, broom and the other things that we don't want in the vegetated melee can stop. We can now assess the extent of issues and send in those bent on *Destruction*. Instructions for search-and-destroy: "A. Go to GPS mid-point X, directly below the camera's location, and B. proceed at a bearing of Y degrees for Z tree stems, C. bayonets at the ready, D. seize and destroy the suspect. E. Death should be merciless and swift."

Footage may also help in identifying routes for new tracks through desirable vegetation such as the SBW!

Skidsite development

Currently, planning is under way for the development of the Skidsite to mark the centenary of Ben's acquisition of his property. Picnic tables/seats, informative signage, and a lookout above the eastern side, overlooking the flat area with lower profile native flora, should be quite an amenity for the many walkers from Dunedin. The Firebreak is once again incredibly busy with walkers of all ages, leashed dogs, cyclists, even occasional horse-riders. We may seek donations and/or the Dunedin Amenities Society assistance with this development which should prove popular.

Donations. If you wish to donate, please use account 03-1369-0356642-00. Let us know at benruddtrust@gmail.com who you are if you would like a receipt emailing, and so we can say THANKS. Donations are tax-deductible, and Ben's Charity number is CC29407. *A big thanks to Ron and Sarah Keen for their continuing generosity!*

Events to attend

We have our next work party on 5 Sept (6th is the rain-day) for tree-releasing, replacing sacks, and possible track work. On either 17 or 18 Oct join us to celebrate our *Rhodos In The Wild*.

Electronic records

File storage and management is now an issue especially with massive drone footage files. A spreadsheet records and reveals all the work being done, biodiversity trends observed, and work needed. This is useful not only for our own reporting, but for future trusts, or the OTMC if management were to return to them, and for kindred groups to see what we've done. The record needs to be complete and correct, and not exaggerate or belittle efforts made. Any work done (authorised by the Trust, please) needs recording. The DCC needs to know how much we are doing before it can consider financial assistance for our projects.

It seems like progress is not slowing down – your new Trust has been in place for barely two years and we have achieved a lot! I hope you agree from your reading of the above.

Please contact the Trust if you have any contributions, advice, suggestions, etc, for these newsletters, or for property or data management. We can be emailed at benruddtrust@gmail.com, or try phoning 03 481 1478

On behalf of the Trustees, Richard Pettinger, with significant contribution by Trust Chairman David McArthur. Thanks, David.