

Pīpī

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Newsletter from Hinewai Reserve, Banks Peninsula
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Down to the sea See pages 4 to 5

Worlds apart

How suddenly the World changed. One minute walkers from everywhere were visiting Hinewai. As usual we were practising greetings in as many languages as we could muster, so that we could mihi everyone on our tracks and make them feel welcome. Next minute the Nation's borders closed. Aotearoa Ltd adjourned. "Lockdown" was on everybody's lips.

Pandemics had happened before, of course, and were bound to happen again. And we were well-warned. Our profligate tripping by car and plane was not only threatening ourselves with inexorable

2 climate change, but also ensuring that the next pandemic would spread as rapidly as a jet aircraft, as swiftly as a tsunami, faster than the 1918 flu, quicker even than SARS, less than two decades ago, when the World was still not quite the frenzied folly of 2019.

Lockdown on Greater Hinewai, 1500 hectares of regenerating wilderness and birdsong, has hardly



proved an ordeal. Hugh, Paul and Tricia carried on more or less as usual, pottering away [carefully of course - Ed.] at both outside and inside workfaces. (Andrew was at his Heathcote family home when the doors clanged shut, and had to stay there.) The big difference was that suddenly

Homo sapiens was reduced to extreme rarity. If we did chance to meet one we had to stay at least 2 metres away. Farmer Richard reckoned it was easier for us rural folk to judge this spacing if we thought of it as one cow. Paul thought that 2 metres was a very short cow. Ex-Canadian Erin from Akaroa explained that in North America a caribou was recommended [lengthwise - Ed.].

Suddenly, too, cruise ships vanished from Akaroa Harbour. The last one left on 15 March with coronavirus on board, so nobody had been allowed to land. Level 4 Lockdown began ten days later.

In the midst of lockdown we were further fretting about lack of rain. Lyneke, a valued Hinewai worker back in 2007-8, phoned from Whanganui to find out how we were faring. The conversation veered off course at one stage. Lyneke was talking about "the virus", which Hugh misheard as "the fire risk". She probably wondered whether Hugh still had all his marbles when she heard him reply: "oh yes, we did have quite a virus here for a while but the recent rain fixed that." If only it were that simple.

All together

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If planned for a month later, our Open Day hui of 23 February would have been impossible, indeed illegal. As it was, around 500 people filled the sunlit valley floor at Ōtānerito, trailing off on guided walks to Fantail and Wairuru Falls. Ten mm of rain the night before, though hardly a drought-breaker (or a virus blocker), had freshened air, plants and spirits; it was a truly lovely day. Chiefly a celebration of Hinewai, the gathering also marked 150 years jointly totted up by the Reserve Manager and his twin sister Hilary.

Many people lay behind the smooth running of the Open Day, but Tricia and Paul deserve particular mention, as do Bruce Hansen, the Akaroa Lions, and the generous locals who contributed their time, skills and shuttle vans.

West

Straight after the Open Day, Hugh took off on a rare holiday, biking the West Coast Wilderness Trail with his young (60) cousin Mark from remote Auckland. He was a wee bit anxious whether his ageing body would cope with day after day in the saddle through Westland rain, sun and sandflies, but the worry was needless. He even managed to keep up with young Mark [more or less-Ed.]. They soon found that rainforest looks its loveliest in rain. The sun shone too. Sandflies? None. [to speak of-Ed.].

Hugh and Mark



4 have numerous kith and kin on the Coast, and these lovely locals pulled out all the stops for the travellers, cycling sections of the trail with them, flocking for a family feast in Hokitika, and, gathered on their wild western shore, watching the sun sink in to the Tasman Sea. One memorable day, niece Jane of Ruatapu organised a flotilla of twelve kayaks so that everyone - four generations - could paddle out on to Lake Mahinapua and down tranquil Mahinapua Creek. Kahikatea trees towered above the paddlers in to blue sky. Kōtuku flew overhead like angels. The hot sun scorched Hugh's ankles, usually a dark, foetid, sunless region clad in work boots. He blamed the drips from his paddles, washing away the sun block, also his ancestors who had clearly spent far too long in Europe, fading from African tan to pallid pink, woefully inadequate for South Pacific skies. His great grand-nieces explained that if he had gripped his paddles correctly the drips would have landed in the water instead of on his feet. They seemed a wee bit surprised that Great Grand Uncle Hugh had been around for 75 years without learning this simple fact. Somehow the West Coast families managed to ferry the bikes, from launch-site to landing, in Jane's horse float, even though Jane was paddling with everyone else for the duration. Westland is a magical place, and this feat was no doubt achieved with the wave of a wand and a muttered spell.

East

Not even Covid-19 could thwart the transfer of the 37 treasured hectares of Armstrong land at Stony Bay. Consents were completed, purchase agreements penned, money mobilised, and settlement date is around the time this newsletter is landing in your letterboxes. Meanwhile, Mark Armstrong brushcut the tracks through

the Mokimoki Covenant that will form part
of a walking route through to the shoreline.

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Hoiho / yellow-eyed penguin

This is a modest but momentous milestone on Hinewai's odyssey. For a long time we have dreamed that one day the reserve would take in a full sequence of peninsular ecology, from subalpine summits to the sea, from snow tussocks blowing in the upland winds down to saltwater surges heaving through bull kelp, paua and penguins, ki uta ki tai.

Whither the withering weather?

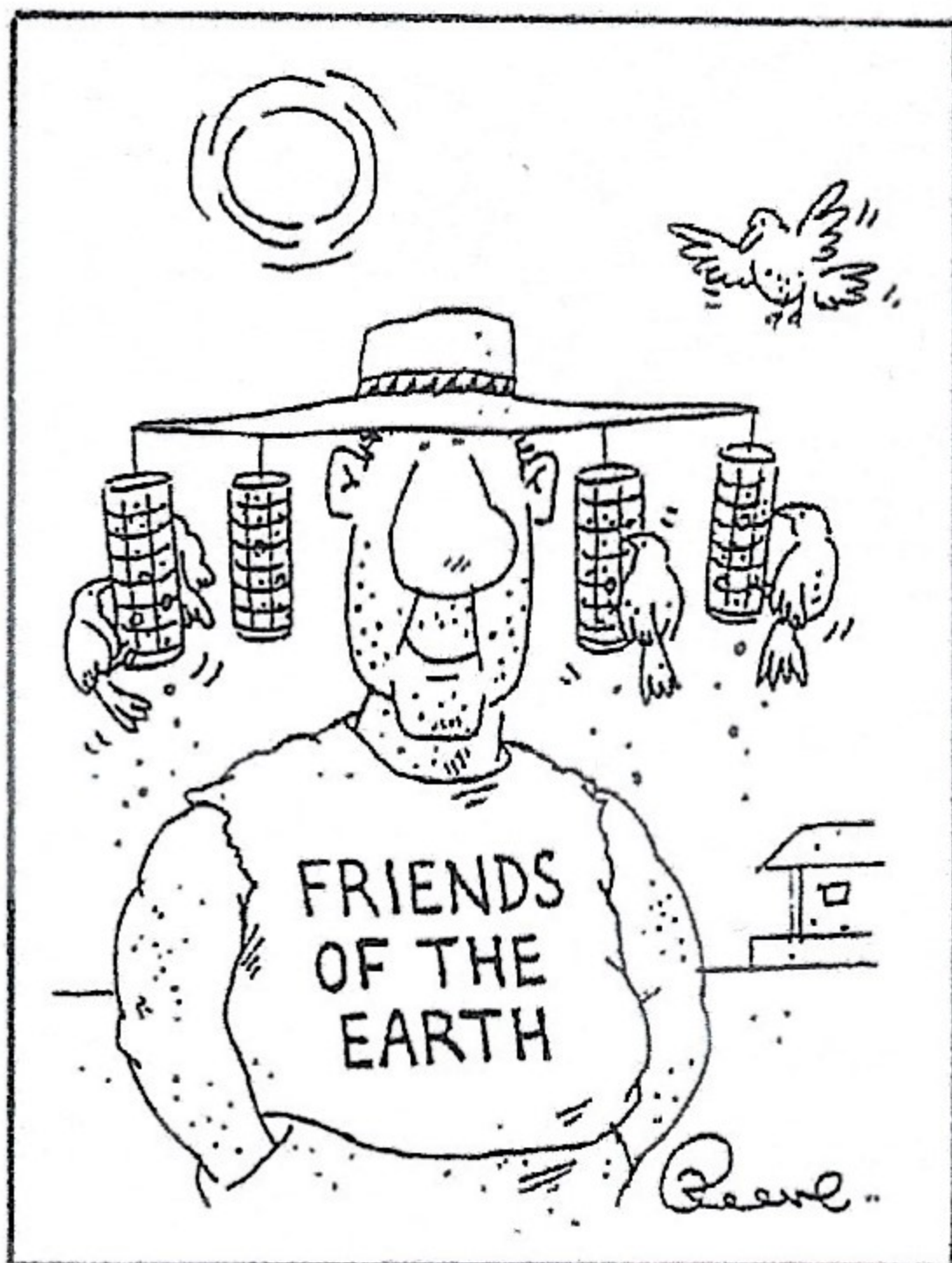
Parts of Aotearoa — notably Northland and Hawkes Bay — have suffered their worst droughts ever recorded. Hinewai endured a thirsty summer, but not a dire one. The pattern was for increasing anxieties about deepening drought, to be curbed in the nick of time by adequate if not generous rainfall, only to be followed by further drying and renewed angst. Stream flows dwindled. Pūtakitaki Pond fell to 1 metre below full by March and stubbornly stayed there. For a while fuchsia foliage hung flaccid and frizzled.

Records for rainless spells were smashed in

6 some parts of the country but not here. Our 32-year climate archives document the longest period lacking a day's rainfall of at least 10mm, as 70 days (1988). The comparative tally this summer was 31 days. Our longest stretch without any rain at all is 18 days (1989). This summer came close at 16 days.

Secondhand smoke

The North Island seems remote enough, but the big West Island is so far away from the South Island mainland that the inhabitants ("Ozzies")



kid themselves they are a country in their own right ("Oz"). Ozzies endured a truly dreadful summer of record-breaking heat and monstrous bush fires exceeding all previous norms. It really is a long way across the Tasman Sea, and you might well suppose we are far removed from anything that happens on the other side. Again and again this season, however, Ozzie smoke dulled

our skies, stole our distant views, and smeared our sunsets with gaudy hues. When the sky turned smudgy brown in early November, NIWA showed satellite images of immense smoke plumes spreading 2000 kilometres across the Tasman, smothering New Zealand, heading on east into the Pacific towards South America. In early February the sun set as an orange moon-like disc, dim enough to gaze at naked-eyed. Next morning the smoky pall was blowing out to sea, leaving behind lucid air and a lingering stain along the far-eastern horizon.

Name-calling

Our new electric quad bike quickly proved its

worth, quietly carting workers, tools and materials to distant workfronts, especially in Stony Bay Valley. Rather than saying "the electric quad bike" all the time, Paul thought a name would be nice. Suggestions were invited at the Open Day. Numerous names were offered, but "Pip" won.

We also needed a name for a route we are using from the cattlestop on Brocheries Road to the crater rim, where Skyline Beech Lookout Track has heavenly views in all directions. The path follows an old farm track in a straight line from A to B. In contrast

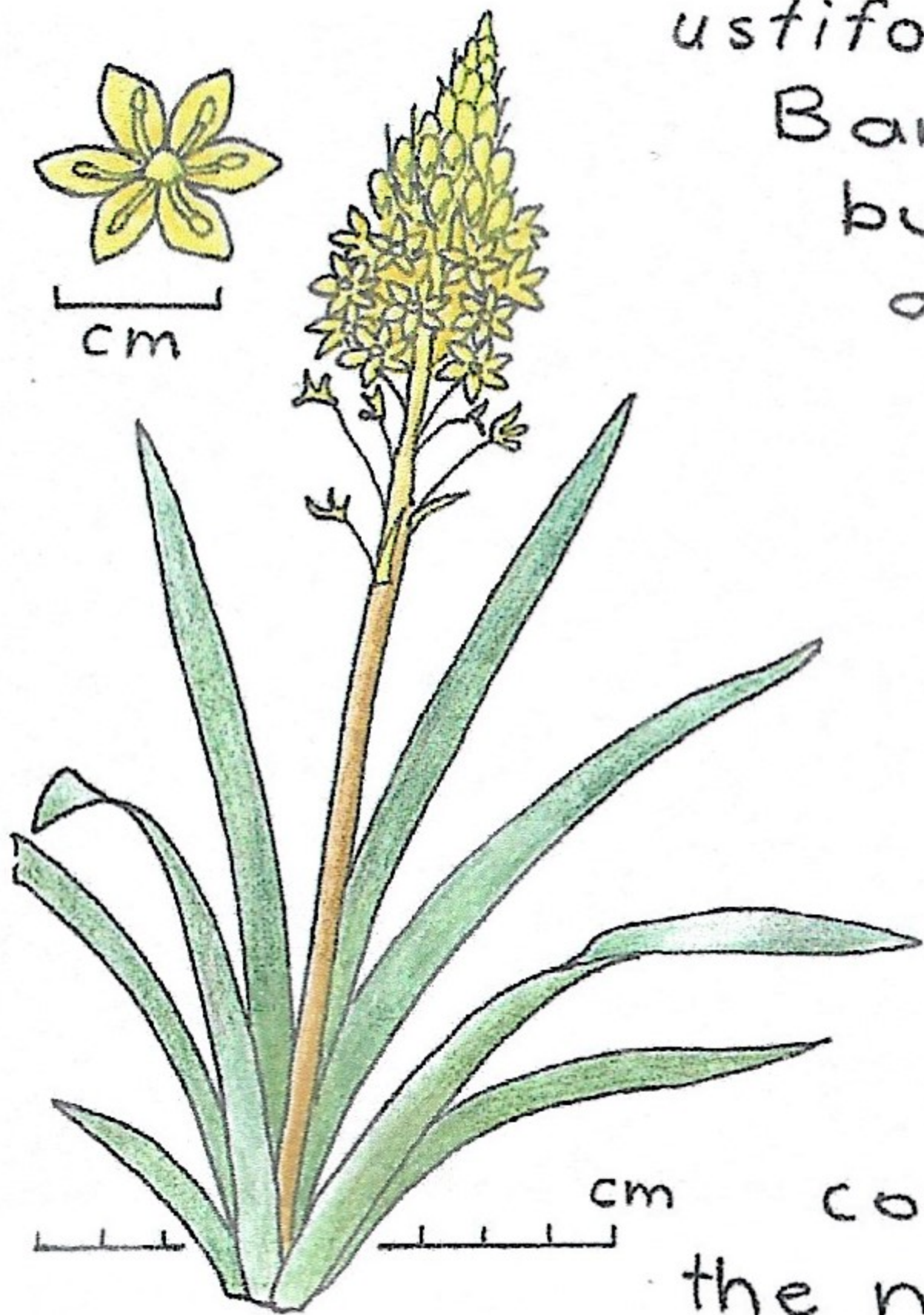


Skyline Beech Track wends a wiggly way up over a turfy shoulder, where a few years back we discovered the slender little native gentian, *Gentianella grisebachii*. After much discussion and voting we decided to call the old farm track "Yarrow Way" after the abundant wildflower there. When Hugh wrote a note about the vote to Paul and Tricia he couldn't resist adding "The way to the hill is paved with good thin gentians, but the way to Heaven is a straight and yarrow way." [Oh, very droll - Ed.].

High on Hītoi

Near Stony Bay Saddle, Tara Track skirts two sharp little peaks we call North and South Hītoi, after native pipits who live there. The vegetation is special — beautiful upland shrublands of big tussocks, bushes and mountain flowers. One sunny late November day Paul and Hugh were deleting scattered gorse here, when Paul chanced upon a plant never seen on Hinewai before. He recognised it immediately as a *Bulbinella*, a genus

8 boasting 6 species in New Zealand, around 20 in South Africa, and none elsewhere. Plant biogeographers have long scratched their erudite heads over that one. One species, *Bulbinella angustifolia*, has been known from



Banks Peninsula for 150 years, but it is vanishingly rare here, a tenuous outlier of extensive populations in the mountains far to the west. Hugh has it growing at his doorstep, so sees it every day. When Paul showed him the plant on North Hīoi, he suspected at once that it was another species, *B. hookeri*, completely unexpected, never recorded from the Peninsula before,

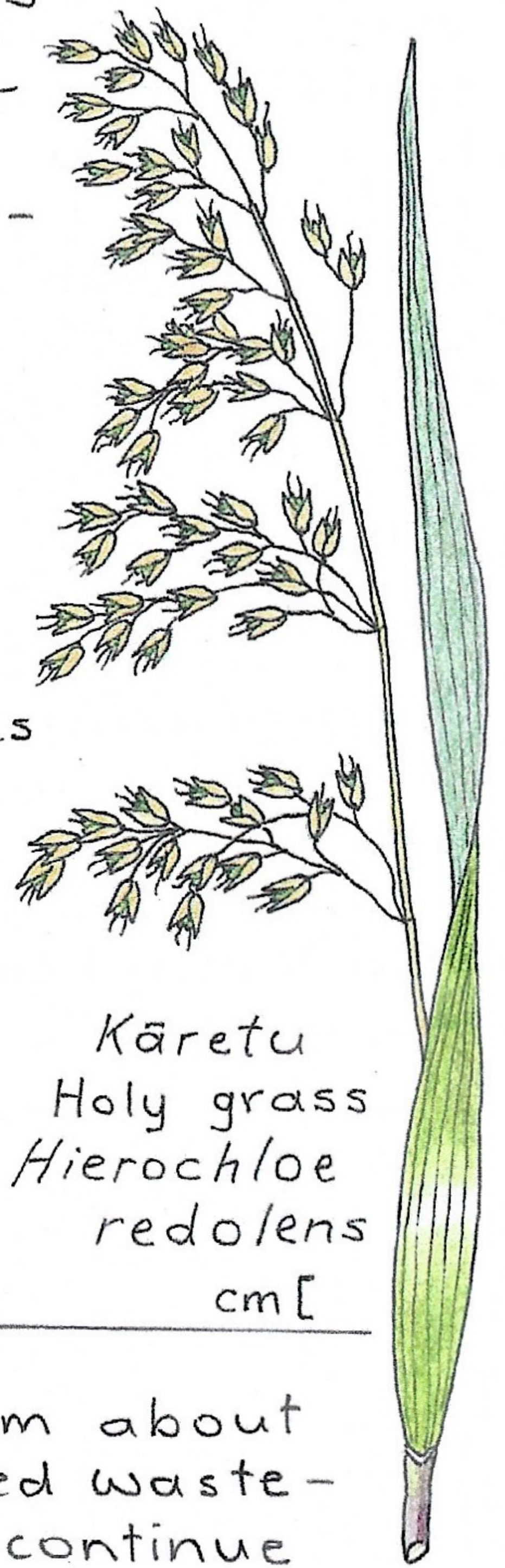
the nearest known populations no closer than the Waiau River, 100 kilometres to the north. In the following weeks, the plant flowered, then set the distinctive capsules that confirmed its identity. Old stalks showed it had flowered last summer too, and Paul counted ten youngsters establishing in the surrounding turf. How did it get here?

New Zealand bulbinellas look like miniature golden-flowered versions of African red hot pokers, *Kniphofia*, popular in New Zealand gardens, and botanically related. *B. hookeri* is a cool addition to Hinewai's flora. We hope it arrived here naturally. If its ancestors managed the gap between Africa and Aotearoa, the jump from the Waiau mountains to Hinewai is laughingly inconsequential, but still unlikely.

As low as they go

Two passing walkers reported "vehicle damage" to Tara Track. Paul left his Summit Track work-face to investigate. To his dismay he found that

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One or more yahoos had attempted to drive some sort of motorised machine along our lovingly maintained walking trail, past the barrier at Stony Bay Saddle with its clear sign ON FOOT ONLY, through a closed gate, then on and up towards the top of Tara-terehu. Shrubs were crushed, the track surface was gouged and rutted, naturally placed rocks were shunted aside, and a post was pushed over. This foolery was finally foiled by a steep thick sward of native kāretu not far below the summit. Paul secured the barrier and gates to discourage any more incursions. We are following up clues to the culprits. It was a disappointing abuse of the reserve's welcome to everyone to walk freely along our network of tracks. Put in context, the incident is one of only four episodes of wanton vandalism in 33 years. That's four too many, but not a lot.



Kāretu
Holy grass
Hierochloa
redolens
cm [

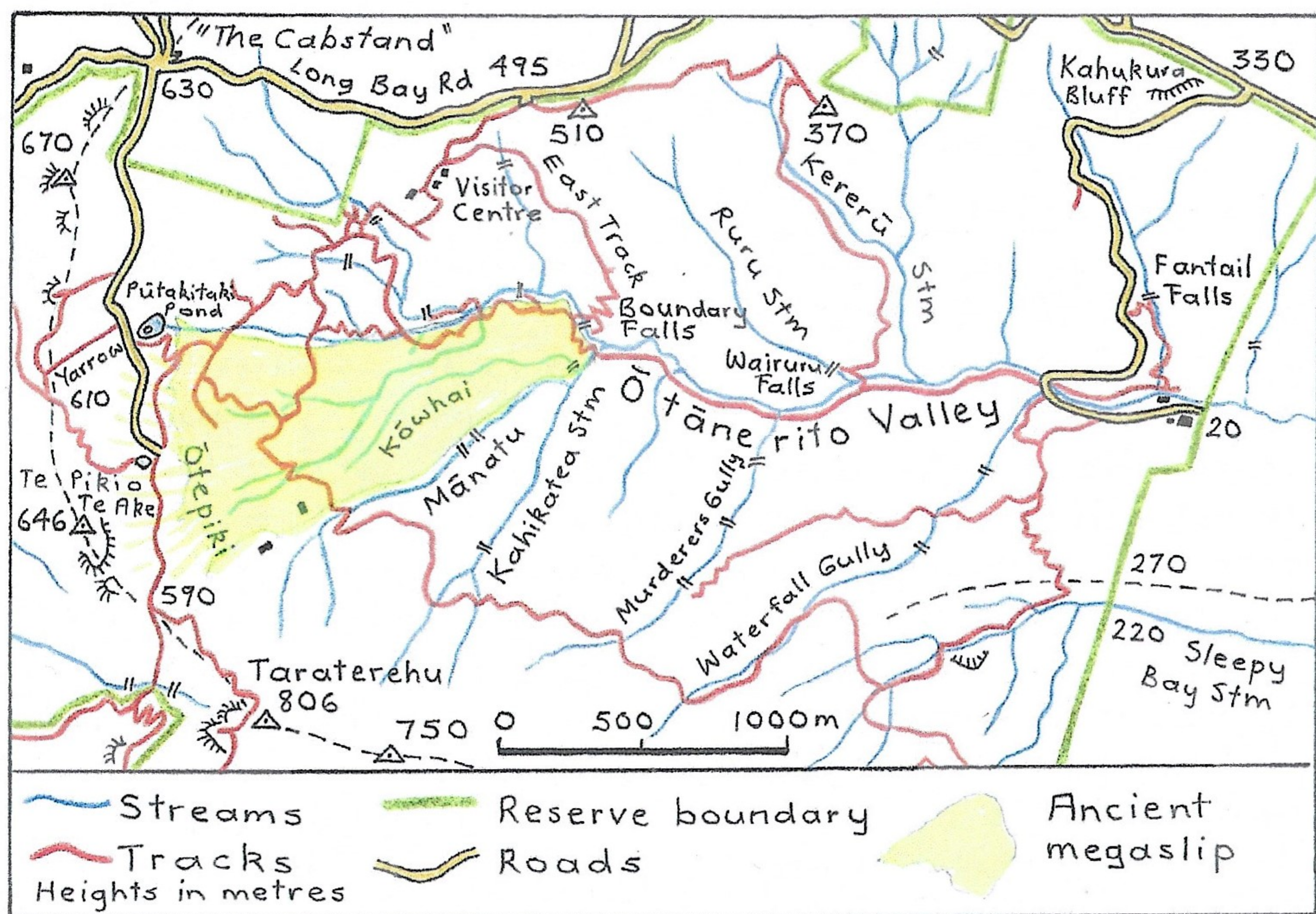
Wastewater woe

Akaroa has a chronic conundrum about what to do with the town's treated wastewater. The simplest solution is to continue diluting it in the sea. It is said to be so purified that one could drink it [one what? - Ed.), at least when the system works well. Ngāi Tahu are strongly opposed to marine disposal. Other possibilities are to irrigate it on to forest or farmland, including native plantings. Suitable sites, and local acquiescence, are hard to find. It was probably inevitable that the Council would approach us eventually to consider whether Hinewai's burgeoning bushland might benefit from extra moisture. One possible gain was a lake.

10 for fire-fighting and wildlife, like Pūtakitaki Pond but many times bigger. As the scope and scale of the scheme became clearer, it seemed less and less appropriate. We were nervous. Under Public Works provisions the land could be compulsorily acquired. This doesn't have to be a long story though. In late March the Council phoned: Hinewai and Ōtepiki would be unsuitable for wastewater, not only because of physical constraints, but also because they considered the reserve was too valuable for the environment and for the community to be compromised in this way. We breathed a collective sigh of relief.

A monumental slip

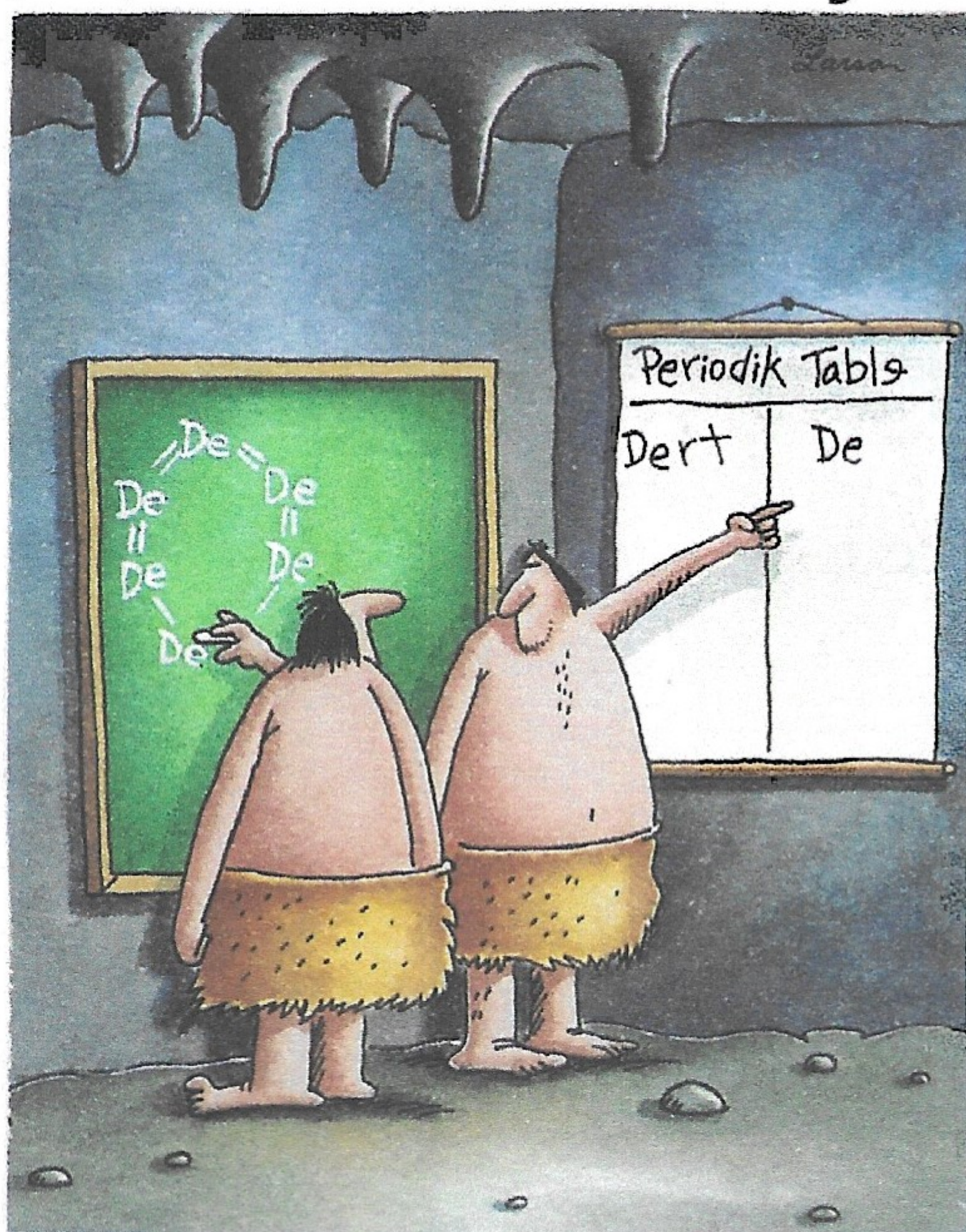
During the wastewater inquiry, Richard the geotechnical engineer answered an old question: what explains the unusual landform of the Ōtānerito Valley head? Hugh had long wondered whether the huge lobe extending from below Te Piki o Te Ake



down to Boundary Falls and Kahikatea Stream // might be a congealed lava flow dating back to the final outpourings of Akaroa Volcano, eight million years ago, into an already deeply carved-out valley. No. The feature is much more recent, perhaps a few thousand years old. The lobe is a gigantic landslide. Richard's guess is that it probably resulted from a big earthquake, shaking super-saturated ground. The slip is clearly depicted on a 2008 geological map, but Richard also showed us some extraordinary images, using clever technology that strips away the vegetation (virtually, not actually, thank heavens) to reveal the naked land beneath.

Persevering on pines and possums

Daily labour on tracks, boundaries, weeds and varmints didn't languish at lockdown. Paul, for example, notched up victories in the ongoing war on wilding pines. Copper-brown expiring conifers pepper the regenerating bush around Kahukura



Early chemists describe the first dirt molecule.

Bluff. Wee ones are winkled out at the ankles, bigger ones are painstakingly poisoned. Possum numbers are waxing again. Major pushes are in the pipeline for both Ōtānerito and Stony Bay Valleys, and for Purple Peak Curry Reserve.

Thrilling fauna

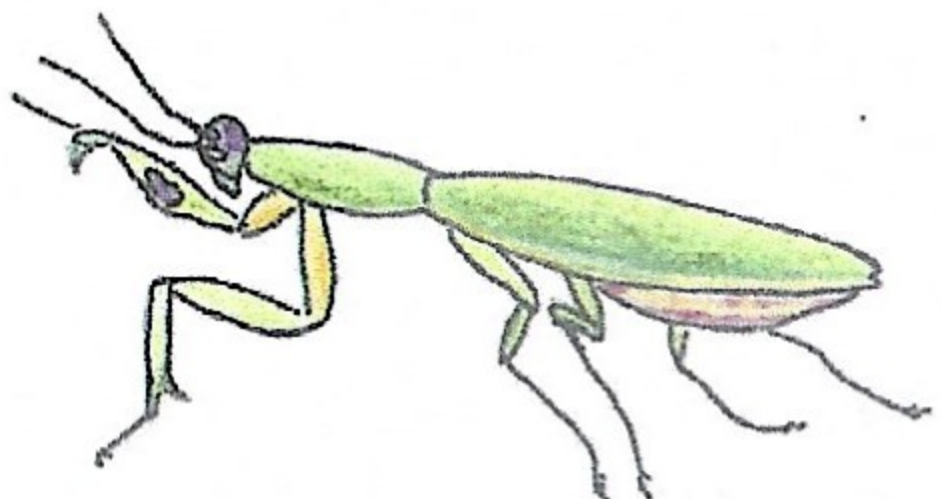
We meet falcons almost daily now, but the thrill is no less fierce for being frequent. One April day Paul looked up from Summit Track to see six raptors overhead,


12-one falcon, making impetuous passes at five harrier hawks, none of whom seemed unduly concerned. In mid-May Paul and Tricia watched three falcons together, perhaps two parents and a youngster, flying and calling over the Narbey pines.

Kererū make two sounds. The whoosh of their wings is unmistakable, but up close you can hear their remarkably human-like "coo". Four young city children were surprised by a "coo" right beside them at the Wahanui Info Board. "Who's there?" one called out. Immediately a kererū thrust head and shoulders out of concealment in the māhoe foliage, his rainbow colours, his snowy front, and his crimson eye, all within touching distance, splendiferous in the sunshine. After a minute, curious but unperturbed, the bird flew off to cries of "ooh" and "aah", the youngsters' hair lifting in the backwash of air from the powerful wings.

Is small beautiful?

Pīpipi's new format is a trial. It is simpler and more economic. Alan Scott of *printing.com* explains that the size of the newspaper is reduced by half but the image only by a third [Trust him - Ed.]. Barring a negative response, we will continue with the new look, so that if you are saving your issues, perhaps you could start a new compact binder from number 51 onwards.



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