

HONOURING THE DEDICATED PEOPLE FROM WHOM WE HAVE INHERITED THIS PARKLAND.

The first move to secure land in the Waitakere Ranges as public reserve was made in 1894, when a large and influential deputation, which included Dr J. Logan Campbell, waited on the Auckland City Council asking that the Council appeal to the government to preserve some native bush there from destruction. The council made representations to the government and met with success. By legislation passed the following year, 5 separate blocks of Crown forest reserve in the Waitakere Ranges, totalling nearly 5000 acres, were vested in the Auckland City Council as reserves for the purposes of recreation and for the conservation of native flora and fauna. The largest of those blocks was situated in the Lower Nihotupu Valley and later became water catchment land, but all the rest has remained parkland.

About 1899, the Crown re-purchased from their private owners, 2 small blocks of land on either side of the Piha Road and declared them to be public reserves. Today the Kauri Grove Track traverses one of them.

In 1910 the McLachlan family gave the Cornwallis Block to the City Council, and about 1913, Henry Atkinson gave the council land at Titirangi. After World War 1, Wesley Spragg gave both the Kaiteraki Block and 'Spraggs' Bush' to the City Council.

In 1922, a petition to the City Council requested that the beautiful piece of natural scenery at Cascade Creek be saved from milling. The council took up that request and by 1925 a total of 1500 acres had been purchased jointly by the Crown and the council and became the Cascade/Kauri Park.

It was a time of great public enthusiasm for the Ranges. Mr. Earle Vaile was a leader in a movement to create a great park there. In 1926 a huge deputation waited on the city council. The deputation filled the Concert Chamber and pictures of the area were shown.

However, despite the public enthusiasm, the proposal did not find political support. The city council had only recently dipped its hand into its water supply account to the extent of £30,000 to fund its share of the Cascade/Kauri purchases. It decided that its financial resources were not sufficient to justify so large an undertaking outside its boundaries. So the proposal languished and was made impossible by the subsequent economic depression.

However the proposal to create a great park in the Waitakere Ranges was revived in 1936. Eventually in August 1939, the establishment of a scenic park in the Waitakere Ranges was adopted as the appropriate project to mark the centennial. And the Act establishing the Auckland Centennial Memorial Park Board was passed in 1941.

There is a certain ambiguity about which centennial the new Park was to memorialise. The national centennial year was 1940. Auckland's centennial occurred the following year. But no matter. At last a coherent image of what the Waitakere Ranges could be had emerged in the public mind.

My relationship with the Centennial Memorial Park began soon after World War 2 when our family returned to Auckland to live and my father built a bach on family land at Little Huia. We became aware that much of the bush surrounding Little Huia was parkland, so that during the holidays we enjoyed the freedom of both bush and beach. Later Marjorie and I built our own bach there. So that my close connection with the Centennial Memorial Park has extended over nearly 60 years.

Some reminiscences –

In 1947 Mt Donald McLean was not part of the Park. My uncle the late Philip Turner offered to contribute 10 shillings per acre towards the £3 per acre which the late Bob Gordon was asking for that property. Arthur Mead the Park Board secretary considered £3 per acre too

high a price. But eventually in 1949, the Board paid that price for Mt Donald McLean and its 108 acres. £3 per acre was indeed a very high price. Most of the land purchased by the Park Board during its life-time was purchased for much less than £3 per acre. In 1949 the county road ended far short of the present parking area. And I recall that many times before the park road was constructed in 1961, we climbed to the top of Donald McLean by crashing through the tall fern and gorse.

My interest in the Centennial Memorial Park led to my election to the Park Board in 1960. That brought me into close contact with Arthur Mead, the Board's secretary and field officer. He was then a fit and wiry 72 year-old. I was less than half his age. But on field inspections he could leave me standing as we tramped the tracks and bush of the Park. He had been on the City Council's waterworks staff since 1910 and had been its Waterworks Engineer since 1929. So he had an exhaustive knowledge of the Waitakeres and their flora and fauna. He had been appointed honorary secretary of the Park Board and supervisor of outdoor work at its inception early in 1942; he continued as secretary after his retirement as City Council Waterworks Engineer in 1954; and after the Board merged into the new ARA in 1964 he continued as honorary field advisor. He retired from that position in 1970 at age 82 but the Authority minute says "But with his intense interest in the Park, his experience and advice will continue to be available." He was recognised as a foremost conservationist and was awarded the Loder Cup in 1972.

The creation of the Auckland Centennial Memorial Park arose out of the vision and determination of those people who dreamed of a great park in the Waitakere Ranges, and whose political skills and persistence led to the passage of the enabling Act in 1941. They were supported by others who gave funds and land, so that when the Act was passed, 3300 acres of land had already been purchased and another 900 acres donated. But the growth and development of the Park over the next nearly 30 years was due largely to the skill, knowledge, vision and determination of that one man, the late Arthur Mead.

Over the period from 1942 to 1964, when responsibility for the Park was taken over by the new ARA, Arthur Mead personally -

- (a) negotiated many purchases of land, so that the Park grew from its initial 4200 acres to nearly 13,000 acres;
- (b) supervised the work of the rangers, personally inspected the many miles of tracks which already existed in the Waitakeres, and planned and directed the improvement of the track system;
- (c) researched the history of the tracks and recommended names for all of them;
- (d) surveyed the line for the park road up to the shoulder of Mt Donald McLean and the track to the summit, and supervised their construction;
- (e) prepared the first track map and brochure;
- (f) recommended that the mamaku fern be adopted as the park emblem.

Three circumstances came together and enabled Auckland to have its Centennial Memorial Park in the Waitakere Ranges. The first was the widespread public desire of the time to create a scenic park in the Ranges. The second was the economic climate of the day, which enabled the Park Board to acquire large blocks of land at relatively low prices.

It is recorded on the sculpture which we are to unveil today that it has been placed here to celebrate the work of the dedicated people from whom we have inherited this Park.

I have already mentioned the vision and determination of those people who dreamed of a great park in the Waitakere Ranges and who established the Park Board.

I have also mentioned the contribution of people who gave land and money – and who paid rates – so that the Park Board had the resources needed to bring the Centennial Memorial Park into being. I do not need to mention the politicians of past years who played a part – they have their own reward.

I do need to mention the dedicated team of rangers who have cared for terh Park over the years. They are many. Beveridge is a well-known name. However, my memory goes back further to the name of Jack Lawrence – a quiet man who did a great deal for the Park in addition to his duties as Chief Ranger for the Water Supply Section.

Of all the dedicated people from whom we have inherited this park, the foremost was the late Arthur David Mead, the one man in Auckland who was uniquely qualified by training, experience and vision to pursue the Board's objectives successfully.

I believe that he was the "Father of Auckland's Centennial Memorial Park".