Holiday Communities on Rangitoto Island, New Zealand

SUSAN E. YOFFE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................. v.
Acknowledgements .................................................. v.

**CHAPTER ONE** ....................................................... 1
  Introduction ......................................................... 1

**CHAPTER TWO: CONSIDERATIONS OF METHODOLOGY** ............ 5
  Introduction ......................................................... 5
  Gathering the data ................................................ 5
  Approaching the analyses ....................................... 6
  Methodology - some answers .................................... 8
  Conclusion ......................................................... 12

**CHAPTER THREE: SETTING THE SCENE** ............................ 13
  Introduction ......................................................... 13
  Part I: The political and social atmosphere in the 1920s .... 13
  Part II: Rangitoto - geography and history .................... 15

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE BEACON END** ................................. 25
  Introduction ......................................................... 25
  The setting ......................................................... 25
  The baches ......................................................... 25
  How they came .................................................... 25
  Transport ............................................................ 27
  Daily life ........................................................... 27
  Social life .......................................................... 28
  Characters .......................................................... 28
  Conflict ............................................................. 29
  Vandalism ........................................................... 30
  Relationships with other communities ......................... 30
  Fondness ............................................................ 30
  Conclusion ......................................................... 30

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE COMMUNITY AT RANGITOTO WHARF** ......... 31
  Introduction ......................................................... 31
  Background ........................................................ 31
  The beginnings .................................................... 31
  Holiday activities ............................................... 33
  Community life .................................................... 34
  Organisation ....................................................... 38
  Community conflict .............................................. 39
  Characters .......................................................... 39
  Rangitoto - a special place .................................... 40
  Conclusion ......................................................... 41

**CHAPTER SIX: THE COMMUNITY AT ISLINGTON BAY** ............ 43
  Introduction ......................................................... 43
  Location and background ....................................... 43
  The beginnings .................................................... 43
  Daily life during the early years ............................... 46
  Communal life ...................................................... 48
ABSTRACT

The word bach is synonymous with holiday in New Zealand. The bach is the rudimentary holiday home that existed along coasts, lake fronts and rivers throughout the country. This monograph deals with the three bach communities on Rangitoto Island, Auckland, from their inception, just after World War I, to the halting of new leases in 1937. The families who took up leases and built their baches formed close communities. Many of the families still own their leases and their reminiscences of the holidays of their childhoods are the backbone of this monograph. They remember the communal atmosphere, the social events and close friendships which were renewed each succeeding year.

Immediately after World War I, New Zealand underwent great changes in its economic and social structure, followed by the depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Increasing state control encroached into many areas of life, introducing greater uniformity, for example in housing, education and working conditions. When sites became available for lease on Rangitoto, they provided an opportunity for a working class family to build a holiday home away from the constraints of suburban life.

The meaning of community to these people is examined and some explanation of why these ongoing but intermittent communities were so successful is offered. The elements essential to the development of community have been analysed by social scientists without definite result. Furthermore, in New Zealand the question of when community formed is the subject of debate. Pivotal to these arguments is whether or not there was sufficient societal cohesion and stability for community to form. These questions are applied to the communities on Rangitoto in order to understand how and why they developed in the form they did.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the enthusiastic interest of my informants this research would not have been possible. I am most grateful for their generosity in sharing their memories of the bach communities, the networking in introducing me to other bach owners and permission to use family photographs. I know how much their experience on Rangitoto has meant to them and I hope that this work does justice to their memories of wonderful holidays and the friendly community that was so much part of their lives.

Michael Yoffe copied many of the original photos and made his dark room available for printing. Hamish Macdonald also did much of the photographic work and has scanned illustrations into this publication. Joan Lawrence helped with the original graphics, proof read and provided much appreciated advice. Thanks to Diane Rose for final proof reading and Joan Coburn who assembled and corrected the text.

The Department of Conservation Auckland Conservancy was co-operative in making archival material available and assisting with visits to Rangitoto.

Julie Park, my thesis supervisor, has also guided this into production with patience and tenacity. I have been inspired and encouraged by her enthusiasm.

I thank the editorial committee of Research in Anthropology and Linguistics for choosing to publish my research.
Location map of Rangitoto in New Zealand
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Island communities have been a traditional field of study for anthropologists. Since Malinowski in the Trobriands and Margaret Mead in Samoa, small societies, as a microcosm of the human condition have been the subject of anthropological enquiry. Isolated cultures seem somehow to represent a manageable unit for analysis of community values, norms and traditions, and exploration of the causes of cohesion and conflict.

Rangitoto is a volcanic island in the Hauraki Gulf in Auckland, New Zealand. At the end of World War I, sites in three areas of the island became available for lease to build holiday homes. During the 1920s and early 30s, there was steady interest in taking up leases. In 1937, the Department of Lands halted new site rental and sale or bequeathing of baches was forbidden. Existing leaseholders retained rights until death at which time the bach was removed or destroyed. The settlements have progressively diminished with the demise of the leaseholders.

For five years I spent holidays at a bach at Islington Bay, one of the three settlements on Rangitoto. My friend’s aunt was one of the last leaseholders. Over this time I heard many family stories of the holidays spent in the ‘Bay’ community. In its heyday there were forty-four baches and a store. Today, twelve baches remain at Islington Bay, three of which are unoccupied. I became fascinated with the idea of a bustling holiday community which held New Year’s Day boat races, fancy-dress parades and decorated boat competitions. Who were these people; how did they come to take up a lease; how did they interact with each other?

Present and past members of the community voiced the wish that a record be made of the community life as it was in the early years. This expressed desire captured my anthropological interest, simultaneously firing my enthusiastic ethnographic zeal and challenging my capability to be equal to the task.

It was at the New Year’s Eve party 1993 at the Bay that the idea of using the stories of the early life of the community for my thesis was proposed. The party was significantly smaller than those held sixty odd years ago when every bach was filled with family, friends and relatives. Nevertheless, a congenial group of families from five baches were gathered for a barbecue and sing-a-long to celebrate the New Year in the tradition of Isi Bay. As the evening wore on and tongues became looser the idea appeared better and better. People were eager to have their reminiscences recorded. Despite second thoughts in the sunlight of January 1, my doubts were dispelled when I was visited by ‘old timers’ on following evenings and found myself writing notes by candlelight.

The bach-holders were aware that the Historic Places Trust was taking an interest in the baches built in the 1920s. Upon enquiry I found that the Department of Conservation had commissioned a study of the architectural significance of the baches by Jeremy Treadwell during which time a temporary moratorium on the demolition of further baches was in place. Mr Treadwell’s report would also be used as a basis for the formulation of a conservation policy should it be decided to retain any of the baches.

The Historic Places Trust, the Department of Conservation and conservation architect Jeremy Treadwell were all very enthusiastic about my proposed study and offered assistance.

The Treadwell report

The report describes the significant architectural features of the baches, linking them into the historical and social circumstances of the time. In assessing the intrinsic value of the baches, Treadwell makes the observation that baches are part of a highly individual local history involving ‘typical’ New Zealanders in a unique set of circumstances. Domestic buildings, such as houses and baches are structures which exist as a summation of the vision and priorities of the builders. Such priorities include the bach’s appearance, its ability to cater for social and spatial needs of the occupants and the provision of appropriate shelter in the local environment.

The Rangitoto baches, Treadwell argues, are artefacts of their own local history and are important beyond their historic association with an individual or family. The Rangitoto settlements, the baches and public facilities survive today as an example of private initiative and state assistance which provided the infrastructural amenities.

His report recommends that, as there is very little documentation of the island’s local history, and as many of the current leaseholders are old and frail, a study should be commissioned as soon as possible before the community ceases to exist.

That a study is commissioned to systematically investigate the local history of Rangitoto with particular emphasis on recording the individual histories of each bach and the contributions to community life made by the bach-holder. Recommendations 4.01.5 (Treadwell 1993:25).

The information gained from the study would further assist in the identification of historically significant artefacts
and provide information for possible future interpretations of the island for conservation purposes.

This was an ideal thesis topic for me. I could utilise my interest in New Zealand history to write an historical ethnography of the Rangitoto bach communities. With support from my supervisor, Dr. Julie Park, I approached the Department of Conservation in Auckland with the idea. It was well received. It was decided that the study should cover all three communities, Islington Bay, Rangitoto Wharf and the small community at the Beacon. The expansion of the study to three communities led to a necessary limitation on the period covered. I decided that the main period of interest was from inception, directly after World War I, to the temporary closure of the island to civilians in 1939 by which time expansion of the communities had been stopped.

What is a bach?

I think every New Zealander understands what a bach is although there are other names for this construction. In the South Island they are known as cribs. In the past they have been called whare (pronounced worry), or cottages or shacks. Whatever their name, these shelters are a symbol of 'getting away from it all', a place of 'otherness' from everyday life. Baches, such as those on Rangitoto, are places associated with the simple, more basic, and spontaneous lifestyle of holidays. Paul Thompson in his book *The Bach* gives the following origin for the word:

The term bach is an abbreviated form of the word bachelor. The man who lived by himself in simple surroundings was said to be baching ...Men who were without the assumedly civilizing influence of a wife were taken to be undomesticated and lacking in the necessary housekeeping and culinary skills required to live in a 'proper' manner, so 'to bach' or 'baching' referred to a rather basic level of living (1985:7).

The essential bach is a shelter built originally for weekends of fishing and hunting. The New Zealand institution of 'do-it-yourself' is responsible for the form of early baches. Built by amateurs, usually from second hand or demolition materials, the level of design and building skill was often rudimentary - but part of the pleasure of the bach was being its sole creator. Creature comforts were minimal, without running water or electricity, and toilet facilities consisted of a long drop. Living space doubled as sleeping quarters and cooking was done over an open fire or, at best, an iron stove. Baches were built on beaches, lake fronts and river banks - places which afforded a holiday close to nature and outdoor recreation. More often than not without legal tenure, they were built and remained under squatters' rights. Naturally, without legal rights there was little incentive to invest in improvements. Although there can be no census of the wealth of bach owners, it seems that conspicuous consumption was not considered de rigueur in bach communities of the 1920s and 30s. Being 'flash' or 'showy' was socially suspect, in fact a certain pride was taken in making do and inventive utilisation of whatever materials came to hand.

With legal rights being more rigorously enforced and the incursion of local building bylaws, the traditional no frills bach is fast becoming a relic of New Zealand's past. Baches are now disappearing from Abel Tasman National Park, Taylors Mistake and the Boulder Bank in Nelson as they are at Rangitoto.

The bach, that is sometimes charming, sometimes graceless, often idiosyncratic paradise, is being replaced with suburbs in the sand (Thompson 1985:11).

Treadwell (1993:20) notes that the significance of baches in New Zealand social history has only recently been recognised. While their picturesque qualities have been the subject of photographic essays, and their architectural
qualities recognised by various commentators, it is often difficult to assess the historic significance of baches and cribs in New Zealand. Perhaps, as with other vestiges of our past which represent to us our unique relationship with the outdoors, our independence, inventiveness and individuality, - such 'kiwiana' as No.8 wire, black singlets and corrugated iron - we are keen to know more about baches and the communities and individuals who created them.

**Historical ethnography and community studies**

J. and J. Comaroff (1992:5) justify historical ethnography as a useful area of study because modern societies look to history to account for themselves, to see where they have been. They argue that knowledge of our past reassures us of the continuum of social reproduction. ‘We require ethnography to know ourselves ... For (it) serves at once to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar, all the better to understand them both’ (1992:6). Ethnography, they point out, is especially crucial in our own society because the tools presently used to describe modern life are scientific and ahistorical (Stacey 1974: 16, 17). Glass insists, therefore, that our own world is a proper site for ethnographic inquiry.

Historical ethnography is not an attempt at literal translation of the 'others' experience but should investigate the relationships between life, work and authority in people's lives from which they bring their interpretations to bear on each other, in order to 'capture the unity and diversity of social processes' (J. and J. Comaroff 1992:37).

Both history and ethnography are concerned with societies other than the ones in which we live. Whether this otherness is due to remoteness in time ... or to remoteness in space, or even in cultural heterogeneity, is of secondary importance compared to the basic similarity of perspective. In both cases we are dealing with systems of representations which differ for each member of the group and which, on the whole, differ from the representations of the investigator. The best ethnographic study will never make the reader a native. All that the historian or ethnographer can do, and all that we can expect of them is to enlarge a specific experience to the dimensions of a more general one (Claude Levi-Strauss 1963a:16-17 in Comaroff 1992:7).

Sociologists dismiss community studies as 'being mere description', and 'ahistorical' (Stacey 1974:16,17). Glass (1966:148) argues that the lack scientifically comparable material and duplicable procedures renders them 'the poor sociologist's substitute for the novel'. In defense, Bell (1964:ix) maintains that one of the aims of community studies is to build up an image of the structure and functioning of the community through intensive examination, so that the researcher 'captures some segment of elusive reality which would be true to the world of the observed as seen by the particular perspective of the observer'.

Discussion of the nature of communities and social organisation in New Zealand history (e.g. Olssen 1982, Fairburn 1989) provides part of the theoretical context of this study. Community formation in colonial society has become a debate concerning whether isolated groups of people living in harsh conditions led to close-knit communities or whether transience and lack of social bonding obviated such cohesion. Pearson (1979:13), in his opening remarks to his historical community study of Johnsonville, points out that community studies in New Zealand have been confined to atypical groups; ethnic minorities, single purpose industrial townships or rural villages (Pitt and MacPherson 1974, Chapple 1976, Somerset 1938). The value of his study which traces the historical development of a community is that it illustrates the influences of wider social processes on a local setting (ibid:14).

**The aims of the study**

The purpose of my research is to present an understanding of what made 'community' in these 'once-a-year' settlements; to explain the disposition that caused these people to co-operate, share, care and improve their surroundings in a place where they spent only a short part of each year; a place without the formal structures of society - no school, no employment, no church and no civil authority. These explanations will perhaps contribute to the understanding of social processes which are part of our present society.

To ensure that this historical ethnography is more than the social history which Gardner (1957:222) dismissively called 'village pump' history, I have sought to place the experience of my informants at Rangitoto in the context of their wider society and historical framework. In doing so I have made use of data from different sources - photographs, maps, official records and on-site observation. The integration of material from formerly unrecognised sources into anthropological research adds a vital texture to the fabric of total events, bringing to the analysis an interpretation beyond 'mere description'.

In my research into the communities on Rangitoto during the 1920s and 1930s I extrapolate on what it meant to be part of that community. I enquire into their daily life, their physical surroundings and what 'community' meant to them. I ask why 'community' was important and how it worked in a situation that was both intermittent and on going. From the vantage of seventy years, I have an overview of the social and political processes which influenced the people of these communities. At the same time I acknowledge that the text is my representation of my informants' interpretations of their community, which have also been coloured by the distance of time.
The value of this ethnography lies in the attempt to interpret and present a part of New Zealand life lived by our immediate predecessors.

Outline

My opening chapter describes the many sources of data available to me and how I undertook the collection of it. I discuss, at length, my analytical considerations and the solutions I found.

Chapter Three sets the scene for the establishment of the settlements, geographically and historically. Part I outlines the political and social atmosphere of the immediate post WW1 period in New Zealand with particular reference to Auckland. It also outlines attitudes to recreation and nature at the period. Part II deals with the geology and history of Rangitoto. Beginning with the significance of the Gulf islands to the tangata whenua, namely the Ngatitai of Tainui, I then describe European occupation and the subsequent development of the island as a public domain.

Chapters Four, Five and Six deal with each of the communities in turn - Beacon End, Rangitoto Wharf, Islington Bay. Here I have retained the words of my informants, clustering them under subject headings important to the understanding of community life. The brief paragraphs of my text are intended only to lead the reader through an explanation of surrounding circumstances. Their enthusiasm for the project, their fondness for Rangitoto and what the holiday community meant to them, stands out in their words.

The concluding chapter is an exploration of the meanings of these communities to those who were there and places them in the context of the historical events and social change. It begins with the arguments surrounding the character of nineteenth century society. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical tools useful to the analysis. My informants' ideas of community run as a thread throughout the descriptive chapters and are then brought into focus and distilled in order to underpin the theoretical analysis. My conclusions consider the socio-political context surrounding the formation of these communities and discusses the benefit and future use of such an historical ethnography.
CHAPTER TWO
CONSIDERATIONS OF METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The treatment of source material gathered as data for ethnographies has been the subject of recent discussion (J. and J. Comaroff 1992, G. Dening 1991, H. Medick 1987). No longer are written documents accepted as the only truth by virtue of their permanency. Increasingly, the validity of the oral record, both as personal history and tradition, is being accepted. New methodologies are being discussed of how to use, probe, sift and integrate such data into the metanarrative to produce a synthesis of meaning which reflects the reality of the participants as well as that of the producers of written record. As my project has oral data as a significant component, my central concern was to allow it to speak for itself while incorporating it into the analysis.

In the first section I explain how I gathered the raw data for the study. Faced with a vast amount of material I explored the problems involved in writing an historical ethnography. In Part II I present my considerations and review approaches made by researchers to these elements. This is followed by a discussion of how I applied these methods to the analysis of my material.

Gathering the data

My initial task in approaching the study of the Rangitoto communities was to find out about them from every available source. For the administrative information I looked to written sources in official files. However, it was the oral histories which spoke of the experiences of the participants that lead to more interpretative and interesting material. This investigative procedure took six months to complete.

Official record

The written record of the administration of the holiday communities on Rangitoto Island is reasonably well documented. The dealings with the Minister of Lands and the various administrative bodies are held at the National Archive Auckland in files BA AZ 1109 1687 A, B, and C and BA AZ 1109 1686 D and E. These include lists of leaseholders in 1937 and 1957 and the discussions of the legality of the bach leases. In addition the Department of Conservation, Auckland Conservancy, holds a file on each bach.

The records of the Devonport Domain Board under whose jurisdiction Rangitoto fell, are less complete. The North Shore City Archive holds three Rangitoto Domain Board Minute Books, 1890-1905, 1911-1916 and 1925-1927 and Devonport Borough Council Scrapbook 1896-1900. The Minute Books are sparse in detail. They record only a brief précis of discussions and records of application for camp sites, hunting licenses and quarrying permits, expenditures on path making and the tender for Rangitoto Wharf. The other sources of official record are contracts of sale, which include chattels sold with baches, bills for building materials and newspaper articles retained by bach-holding families. Lastly, the Auckland Public Library holds a collection of photographs mostly donated by Mr. Trevor Horner, and his handwritten memoirs.

Interviews with bach-holders

Having reviewed the official documentation, I was familiar with the sequential course of events and had lists of leaseholders and maps. Prepared with this background I approached the second part of the research.

The reminiscences of nineteen people who had been children or young adults during the 1920s constitutes the main part of my research data. They told me of their holiday life there and the significance to them of being part of those communities.

Locating them was not difficult as I had a ready beginning through my friendship with one of the original families at Islington Bay and others I had met there. I was assisted in contacting others by Jeremy Treadwell who was preparing an architectural survey of the remaining baches for the Department of Conservation and had written to existing bach-holders a few months previously. Everyone I contacted graciously agreed to an interview and through them I made contact with others whose leases had expired. I came to understand that Rangitoto was an important part of their lives and the friendships formed there have lasted through the years.

Over Easter 1993 I visited the island armed with maps and lists of tenants to familiarise myself with the geography and layout of the settlements and the relationship of baches to each other. I was also able to talk informally to people who happened to be at their baches at the time.

The interview period covered five months. In the early interviews I was feeling around the subject to get familiar with areas and topics people were willing to talk about. I then reviewed the initial interviews and identified issues and topics to focus on in subsequent ones.

With my letter of introduction I sent a participant information sheet outlining the purpose of the research and
the background to it. I then followed up with a phone call to make an appointment. The appointments were spaced well apart - sometimes due to unavailability of the informant caused by illness or holiday.

All the interviews were tape recorded in the informants’ homes. Most lasted two to three hours. I started by asking them just to talk informally about what they remembered. This usually began with descriptions of the bach and how their parents came to own it. I then directed the discussion to daily activities, special celebrations and outstanding events. Through this we got on to other people, descriptions of family composition, and the ‘characters’. As I got to know more about the communities I was able to ask direct questions about subjects others had mentioned. I took along my maps and lists of names as aide-de-memoire which were useful in bringing up names which had not immediately surfaced. Most people were very generous in making available their photos and old documents for me to copy. Talking about the photos brought back memories of friends and relatives. People were keen to identify themselves and others in the photographs which I carefully noted, only to find some identifications later ‘corrected’ by another informant.

My informants were very welcoming and had prepared for my visit, having photos and old documents ready for me to see. I was usually offered morning or afternoon tea accompanied by home baking. I interviewed people both individually and as couples. Some of the couples had been together on Rangitoto, some had even met there. One interview was with two brothers and their wives. The brothers’ grandfather had been an original bach-holder so they had been holidaying there since babyhood. The brothers’ wives also spent the holidays there after marriages in the 1950s. This was a difficult interview to control as there was much discussion of who was what and when, which went off into private conversation amongst themselves. During another interview the husband felt that he should do most of the talking and continually interrupted himself. During this time I had been formulating ideas on how to approach the analysis, and the theoretical and methodological problems involved. Amongst my readings were J. and J. Comaroff, Introduction to Ethnography and the Historical Imagination, G. Dening, ‘A Poetic for Histories’, and Hans Medick, ‘Missionaries in the Row Boat? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History’.

Although I had considerable information from many sources my concern was how to approach the analysis: how to make sense of the data.

How is it possible to comprehend and to present the dual constitution of historical processes, the simultaneity of given and produced relationships, the complex interdependence of encompassing structures and the agency of subjects, the relationships obtaining among the circumstances of life, production, and authority, and the experiences and modes of behaviour of those affected by these circumstances? (J. and J. Comaroff 1987:76).

I had first to examine how others had approached the matter and establish how their solutions could apply to my research.

**Consideration 1: Defining historical ethnography**

Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:9-10) point out that ethnography is not an attempt at literal translation where the ‘others’ experience is somehow commensurate to our own. It must be an historically situated way of understanding past existences within their own contexts. For me the
difficulty was in looking at a society so close to my own and conceiving of the familiar and obvious as strange and "other". In studying a community of people similar in age and socialisation to myself, or at least my parents, the difficulty was to stand outside, to put aside my culturally induced assumptions and to distance my thinking from the 'taken for granted' norms and putative ways of knowing. How would it be possible to set aside my preconceived notions and assumptions of a society so close in time and space to my own?

Consideration 2: Problems of ethnographic representation.

An ethnography does not speak for the 'other' but about them. Neither imaginatively nor empirically can it ever 'capture' their reality. What is constructed is a view of the past filtered through aspects of the present; a view that was not visible to those who lived it.

As Dening (1991:370) points out, 'the artifice of history's records gives the enquirer control over the past in a way participants could never have controlled their present'. He refers (1991:375) to the triangle of lines between strangers and others and between now and then, as being both the advantage and the frustration of historical anthropology.

In this case the lines form more than a triangle; the distance of seventy years during which my informants' memories and perspectives have matured and mellowed; the contemporary written documents; myself as interpreter and the present day audience. My advantage is that my information comes from many sources: written documents and all the oral histories; my disadvantage is that time has lost some elements - the past is never fully knowable.

Consideration 3: How to locate these communities in the wider society.

Many traditional ethnographies concentrate on discrete groups, dealing with social relationships and shared meanings within the specific arena. These interpretations treat groups as entirely self contained and as having no influences from a wider sphere. Latterly, however, it has been recognised that no society exists in a vacuum and it is therefore essential to locate the meanings and values of a community within the wider society and examine the reciprocal influences (J. and J. Commaroff 1992:77).

This was particularly essential in my study of communities which were spatially temporary but temporally ongoing. Each participant spent the greater portion of his/her life as a member of other, larger communities. The values, influences, connections, attitudes which people brought to the communities at Rangitoto were formed and established outside it. Masons, Workingmen's Club,
religious adherence, were some of the stronger affiliations of community members. The cultural meanings and values agreed with and diverged from each other to varying degrees.

At the same time the Rangitoto communities stood as entities within the wider Auckland urban complex. Their relationships with authorities and services were articulated and mediated both in the wider community; through their existence as discrete communities, whose existence was controlled from outside, and the connections its individual members had with those outside authorities. I am thinking here of the communities’ relationships with the Rangitoto Domain Board, the Department of Justice (prisoners), the Auckland Harbour Board and ultimately the Department of Lands.

Consideration 4: Dealing with the individual

The stories of ordinary people stand in danger of remaining just stories if they are not placed within the context of surrounding events and societal values. How are the individual and the event constituted, culturally and historically? Furthermore, how does the enquirer define or adjudicate the rationalities, private motives and collective consciousness and dominant world views (J. and J. Comaroff 1992: 26). To have any meaning these partial histories have to be situated in the wider world of meaning in which they existed. The problem is to connect the parts to put them into a total context; to make sense of the fragments; to make intelligible the individual lives and representations of others. How do we locate them within ‘a historically determinate environment?’ (J. and J. Comaroff 1992: 17).

Consideration 5: Ethics

...anyone who writes of times past must recognize that there will be people who stand to suffer from the way in which social memory is fixed (J. and J. Comaroff 1992:15).

During the interviews I was constantly aware of the possibility that I could be transmitting information from others inappropriately. People did not always know to whom I had already spoken or may speak to subsequently. There are some contentious issues involved, particularly the continuation of leases, how the launch service was run and the building and running of the hall at Islington Bay. Some informants were self-censoring, others more open. As these issues are important elements in community analysis I needed to record all viewpoints while endeavoring to minimalis offence.

Another factor to be considered in the analysis was that I was speaking only to a small section of the community. Many voices are necessarily muted. This is of particular importance when I heard only one side of a contentious issue such as the denominational divisions over certain matters. All my informants came from the same denomination and all belonged to families who had taken up leases early.

Methodology - some answers

In recovering the past it is necessary to look beyond the visible and immediate sources: the official record, the private written record, and the oral history. As Comaroff and
Comaroff stated, ‘a historical ethnography, then, must begin by constructing its own archive to include the less obvious’ (1992:34).

The official record as well as the private has its own multiple levels of meaning. Both the oral and written record are ‘extraordinarily complex in their sign-bearing characteristics’ (Dening 1991:354). They are as much the subject of as the means of enquiry. With respect to the oral data I have collected sixty or seventy years after the ‘event’ I had to be particularly aware of the personal, cultural and social factors which influence what has been told to me.

Documents aimed at mapping, recording, controlling and organising knowledge are references to the historical social world in which they were used. Not only do the interpretive qualities of the sources themselves have to be considered, but also the references beyond themselves, to the social/political context in which they arose (Medick 1987:93).

Documents, diaries, letters, lists, maps, photographs all contain expressions of meaning beyond their messages.

Moreover, the preservation of these documents is as much a cultural sign as the contents of them. It shows the importance and value inherent in the objects themselves and their representations.

I now examine the evidence I have of the past and discuss methods in which they can be used to expand the archive.

**Documents**

The documents collected include copies of transfer of lease documents for bach sites, inventories of chattels and a builder’s bill. Among the information to be found in them is the prices of bach sites, labour and materials, the way officialdom was regarded, handwriting styles, language, business practice. I can also speculate on the reasons for keeping these aging yellow pages: - they establish the right not only of official ownership but also to family continuity and participation in a special community. It is a souvenir of a fondly remembered and treasured part of their life.

**Photographs**

Photographs as sources of the past are invaluable records. They preserve a visual black and white image of people, their surroundings, dress, artefacts and architecture. By studying the subject matter I gained an insight into those things and events which were considered important enough to warrant photographic record.

The taking and keeping photographs of family and friends is a familiar practice to the modern enquirer, but in the 1920s photography was important but not commonplace. Although it had been around for half a century, cameras were precious and film expensive and the size of the photos, many of which are a tiny 1”x 2”, indicates paper was also expensive. The photographs which record the family activities and events of the community are cultural symbols not only for the visual record but their affective nostalgic value to the participants and their heirs.

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**List of Chattels sold Cleaver - Pelham 30/7/25**

Received from Mr George Pelham the sum of .2 (two pounds) being a deposit on my Shack at Islington Bay Rangitoto and chattels as per list.

Price .50 (fifty pounds) balance .48 to be paid when Rangitoto Domain Board transfer the camp site to Mr George Pelham.

Mr Pelham to take over my camp site and liability for the future rentals from this date also any expenses attached to the erection of the launch landing in Islington Bay.

Signed (G. W. Cleaver)

Chattels to be included in purchase price.

6 Blankets
3 Wire Stretches
3 Fibre Mattresses
3 Pillows
1 Table
3 Chairs
1 Lamp
1 Primus
1 Sofa
knives forks and spoons
8 Small plates
8 Large plates
6 Cups
6 Sauces
1 Gal. Soligumm Stain
Old photographs should be examined for the multi-level messages. These messages can be found through an understanding of the significance, attitudes and values of that time, not through the familiarity we have with the photographic medium seventy years later.

A large portion of the photos I collected from my informants record the special events of the community: the fancy-dress parades, the New Year’s Day dinghy racing and running sports, decorated boats, the New Year’s Eve bonfire. Others attest to personal achievement such as fishing catches, which also reflect those things for which the location was valued. Other photos show the association of people with their surroundings. The subjects are put in context with all the things that make a holiday a holiday: friends, family, water, boat, swimsuits, hats, picnics, the bach.

Most of the human subject photographs are of groups of people arranged informally. They are significant people, family and friends, therefore, no face was to be obscured. These are not merely snapshots but the visual record of treasured family events.

Photographs are a useful tool for observing architecture as it is as much an expression of social values as manners and clothes. At Rangitoto the earliest buildings were mere shacks of packing cases and corrugated iron. In time owners expanded the dwellings, adding on rooms and verandahs. Significantly the photos of baches show only the later improved versions, the crude corrugated iron constructions not being worthy of record.

**Widening the archive**

J. and J. Comaroff (1992:36) found that looking at the physical remnants of the past helped with interpretations which were invisible in the written accounts.

From the location maps of baches and the written record of leases I have been able to trace who lived where and when at the Rangitoto settlements. However, it was only by visiting what remains of the physical community that I was able to envisage the relationships between families by seeing the number and proximity of the bach sites. Although seventy years of vegetation growth has altered the environment somewhat, I can picture the area as it was then: the trees that obscured the view of the neighbours, access to the sea and view, relationship to areas of activity. The wharf, having been the central point in both communities, also became a subtle divider. The sites are strung out along narrow paths facing the water’s edge leading from the wharf on either side. The closer relationships were made between the people who passed each others’ houses to and from the wharf.

**The oral record**

Everyone has a subjective concept of the past. Each person makes sense of the past through family histories, anecdote, gossip, lived experience, the written record, and their interpretation of historic events. Past and present are bound together and interpreted differently by each individual. Furthermore, people construct a multiplicity of narratives of different types appropriate to differing contexts. They talk in different ways about what they know according to the audience and purpose of telling.

How each person constructs their social reality and how they chose to present it to me is influenced by many factors. What they know depends on age, location, family situation, friendships of family and the individual and personal interests. What they tell may be influenced by selective memory, understanding, propriety and response to myself and my project.

As a middle aged woman, I seemed to appear to the respondents as someone whose life experience is close enough to their own to have some shared understandings. They could assume that I have a knowledge of political and social activities of the period. On the other hand, the anticipated use of their information in an academic project, as well as what they thought I wanted to know, may have proscribed what they told me.

In order to understand the way my informants constructed their stories I must take into consideration the many facets which influenced them. Oral data cannot produce a definitive history but rather a pattern of views...
from differing perspectives. The following are a few examples of the divergent perspectives from which my informants reconstruct their views of the past on Rangitoto. How and why people came to take up a ‘camping site’ was always one of my first questions. It usually led to a story of family or friendship connections. Other informants told of more practical reasons.

My grandfather had a yacht called ‘Scout’ and in 1924 went down there and persuaded Mr. O’Gara who had a bach, to sell it. Just a one room place.

The same story has come down to the children of another family differently.

(They) built a bach because they had a launch and used to take girls away for the weekend. Parents did not like this and wanted to have a place where the girls could sleep separately.

Both explanations are undoubtedly true - but one is after all more interesting than the other.

The amount of agreement between the stories of different people often reflects the impact of the content. For example, most informants told me that Islington Bay had formerly been called Drunken Bay, because it was the custom for coastal captains to sober up their crews there before leaving the Hauraki Gulf. This explanation has an element of adventure which evokes memories of the rough good old days and for this reason has been held intact in the collective memory. The name Islington Bay is less interesting and the reasons for the name change are vague and varied. These explanations tend to imply a mocking of the upper class and a touch of anti-colonialism.

Some high ranking somebody called Islington got a flash yacht which he could not sail well enough to go further into the Gulf. He would anchor there for the weekend and give out that he had been much further afield.

Another version has it that it was a favourite picnicking place of the occupants of Government House at the turn of the century. The name was changed in deference to the sensibilities of the ladies in the party. The third story attributes the name change to the visit of the Duke of York when a suitable name had to be found for the bay which he visited on a harbour cruise.

In some stories the events remain the same while the characters change. It enters into the ‘folklore tradition’ of families or different communities as truth and lays claim to fame for the participants. The ‘Corky’ Cassidy story was told by informants from two communities. The basic elements of a child miraculously found floating in the sea and rescued by two people out fishing, are the same; however, the people, location and time of day differ.

Rangitoto Wharf story: Two people of that community were out fishing on a very calm, moonless evening. They heard a child cry out but did not believe their ears. After ten minutes they found the child floating. He had apparently been asleep in his parents’ yacht, woke up and climbed out of the forward hatch.

Beacon End story: A couple from that community were fishing during the day when they heard a child cry out. They found him and brought him to shore. Soon they saw several yachts zigzagging across the water and signaled them. The search party came ashore and claimed the child who as a result earned himself the nickname ‘Corky’.

Some people’s stories are coloured by selective editing in the light of what is proper to tell but others are more candid. This may reflect an anxiety about the use of the information or simply ‘that some things are better not spoken of’.

To establish relationships within the community I asked about the family and friendship connections between people. Both reticence and frankness can be seen in the following examples.

A. One woman told me that she met her husband at Rangitoto where she had been for 9 years and he over 20 years before they married. Another informant told me she was his second wife, the first wife also having been there during those years.

B. When I enquired into the marital status of another longtime resident whose wife was never mentioned the usual response was that he was a bachelor. Later one informants told that his wife could not stand island life and had left.

C. When I received back the interview transcript from one informant the deletions included reference to another person’s first marriage to a member of the community.

There is a human tendency to look at the past ‘through rose tinted glasses’. At seventy or eighty years of age my informants remember their youth on Rangitoto as an endless summer of good clean fun, fishing, family, friends, co-operation and social activities.

We never tired of going down there. Could not imagine going anywhere else. So many people, it was a real community then. There is no place comparable to it.

We had lovely fun. We all made our own fun. Go round to others’ cottages. Really lovely times. We all became very close you know and even to this day.

Nevertheless, the transcripts reveal areas of contention which include denominational fractionalism, the building and use of the hall at Islington Bay, the launch service, and the use of alcohol. The way the dissension is presented and discussed by the informants is another matter for analysis which I address.
Conclusion

The collection of the data, interviewing and transcribing was an all consuming task. It was most enjoyable to record people’s recollections of their ‘wonderful’ childhood holidays and examine photographs of their parents, grandparents and themselves as children. I was fascinated by the pleasure these memories brought. It all helped to create in my mind an image of the past settlements.

However, an historical ethnography is the product of thorough data gathering subjected to careful and disciplined analysis. The researcher must constantly be aware that the fragmented evidence comes to her through the differing perspectives from which the oral record is told, and the less obvious meanings in the written record. I have read, listened and analysed the data using the tools and methods mentioned above. With the benefit of hindsight and the availability of evidence from many sources I have studied events, things, people from a perspective not available to the participants. I have, therefore chosen to present my informants’ stories in their own words mindful that my short interpretive paragraphs should in no way detract from the vitality of the story. My discussion of the communities is treated separately.

This study does not pretend to reconstruct the life of the holiday communities on Rangitoto, but is an explanation of how and why an ongoing intermittent community functioned in the 1920s and 30s.

The past, which we are mythically confident is knowable as such, is only known through symbols whose meaning is changed in the reading of them and in the preserving of them (Denin 1991:355).
CHAPTER THREE
SETTING THE SCENE

Introduction

Part I: The political and social atmosphere in 1920s

It is said that New Zealand became a nation through the experience of World War I. Despite the enormous cost both human and material, the nation looked forward to a new world with optimism. The state progressively took a role in assisting its citizens to build a healthy, moral modern nation but the Depression halted these developments and shocked people who then sought stability in a return to pioneering values.

Outdoor activities have always been part of the 'kiwi' lifestyle both for recreational pursuits and socialising. Aucklanders are well served with two harbours and vast a coastline but at the turn of the century access to beaches and islands was limited to those areas served by public transport. When camp sites became available for lease at Rangitoto they presented the working class family with an affordable option for a family holiday.

Part II: Rangitoto - geography and history

The dark volcanic cone of Rangitoto Island is visible from almost all parts of the city but the geology and physical history of Auckland's youngest volcano is the subject of debate. Maori settlement of the Waitemata and the islands of the Hauraki Gulf was prolific from the earliest days. For Maori, Rangitoto was sacred as their explanations of its existence attest. Maori occupied the neighbouring island of Motutapu, utilising its fertile soils and rich fishing grounds which made it a valuable asset when European land purchasers arrived. In 1890 Rangitoto was gazetted as a reserve to be administered by the Devonport Domain Board. The development of amenities to allow the general public to enjoy the island led to the offer of leases for camp sites at the end of the first decade of this century. However, the legality of these tenancies and petitions to preserve the unique flora of the island resulted in a moratorium on new leases in 1937. This chapter covers the background and explains the existence of the Rangitoto bach communities.

Part I: The political and social atmosphere in 1920s

Post war optimism

By the early 1920s New Zealand was recovering from the impact of the First World War. The moral and material devastation had brought New Zealanders to the realisation that they were very much part of the Western world and if the country was to take its place as a mature nation it must invest in its most important resource - people. The Arcadian view of New Zealand as a working man’s paradise of bountiful resources from which a comfortable life could be won through hard work and individualism, was on shaky ground. Yet it was recognised that the State must assist those unable to help themselves.

However, World War I had a great effect in stimulating national feeling. 'Somewhere between the landing at Anzac and the end of the battle of the Somme, New Zealand very definitely became a nation' (Ormond Burton quoted by Sinclair 1987:24). New Zealand soldiers, despite suffering massive losses, had distinguished themselves in bravery, hardiness and discipline - and had been recognised for it. It was the first time so many New Zealanders had been overseas. They had the opportunity to compare themselves to other Allied troops and were pleased with the score. At home too, almost the entire nation had unified for the 'war effort' to support their men, and women, overseas. The nation was proud of its place as a fully fledged member of the international forum.

Optimism pervaded. The Allies had won the war to end all wars so that a new era could begin. Normal life which had been put 'on hold' for four years could resume, but not with the old ways. The positive attitude created by the return of the men from overseas, and the feeling that now a new modern nation could be built, imbued the national psyche. It was a time of change: out with the old and in with the new. The contact with European and American culture made people more receptive to new ideas in fashion, music, film and consumerism. Programmes were established to train young men, create jobs, and enable them to get on the land (The Discharged Soldier Settlement Act 1918). Government programmes aimed at improving and controlling the health, education and housing of the population were put in place. The power of the State grew as the policy that organisation was essential to survival gained credence (Olssen 1981:272). It was made clear that neither the physical nor moral care of children should be entirely the responsibility of parents. The Plunket Society, established in 1908, created a science of childcare and educated women to look after their babies. Domestic Science became a compulsory course for girls in 1917 in order to give ‘... the best all-round equipment in body, mind, morals and inclination for home life and potential motherhood' (Truby King). During the 1920s health care was made free for those who could not afford to pay and measures were taken to standardise and control both public and private hospitals.
The Depression of the 1880s had caused pioneering families to leave the land and migrate to the cities. Now many returned servicemen chose to settle in Auckland to take up work and training schemes, and to benefit from the housing loans. The Labour Government elected in 1935 brought in welfare programmes based on the belief that all New Zealanders were entitled to a job or an unemployment benefit, free hospitalisation and maternity care and free education to university level. The State endeavoured to provide welfare services appropriate to a modern, urban society (Olssen 1981:277).

Attitudes to nature and leisure
It can be assumed that a sizeable proportion of Aucklanders were first generation city dwellers with strong ties to the outdoor life. They saw, perhaps, in outdoor pursuits the opportunity for individualism, away from the fetters of the factory whistle and the bureaucracy which increasingly encroached on their lives.

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Economic surge followed by Depression
A new spirit of organisation pervaded all spheres of New Zealand life. Rationalisation, specialisation and consolidation had become the techniques for promoting efficiency and profitability in the business world as well as the family. The laissez faire attitudes and loose regulations of a pioneer society would not serve a nation bent on modernisation (Olssen 1981:256/7).
class, since early times. As inheritors of the scientific enquiry of the Enlightenment, New Zealanders were fascinated with their new and unique natural world. Rangitoto Island was of special interest due to its relatively young age, volcanic lava flows and the short time since the last eruption (estimated to be early 1700). Many unique plants and ecosystems were recognised by botanists and geologists from the Auckland Institute and Museum. When the ferry service began in 1897 the public took the opportunity to explore this unusual landscape and the summit climb was considered beneficial exercise rewarded by superb views.

Outdoor activities were educational as well as healthy for children. School curricula included studies of plants and animals and birds egg collecting was a hobby as edifying as stamp collecting. Children were included in the fishing trips, to learn how to set the net, bait the hook, to sail and row and to enjoy the gifts of nature.

The outdoors was also the traditional venue for community festivities. Church groups, workplaces, social clubs, sporting clubs, schools and associations all organised outdoor celebrations in the summer months. Large numbers of people were transported to a beach or river where they ate, played games and sports. Group affinity was affirmed through these outdoor functions and group activity.

The picnic venues were dependent upon access by public transport. Only the very rich had private transport and even they were limited to the condition and direction of the roads. The beaches of the North Shore serviced by the Devonport Steam Ferry Company were very popular. Longer expeditions could be made by train to Helensville and Thames.

Holidays away from home for the middle and lower classes were rare apart from holidays with farming relatives. There were boarding houses at such places as Bethells, Huia and Waiheke which were accessible by public transport. Others camped on the beaches around the harbour. Some of my informants explained the situation in Auckland when they were children.

It was pretty rare to have a holiday home. People would not go anywhere very much. It was very costly. Apart from the beaches on the North Shore, where would you go? You could go to Waiwera or you would have to have a car. Transport was different, the roads were different from what they are today. There was more freedom in those days - people used to go camping in certain places. When I was a kid we used to go to Mission Bay and pitch a tent and stay the whole holiday. And they had to go in by boat or bring it in by car or horse cart. For the chap who brought us there it was an all day job ... The whole front of Mission Bay would be filled with tents. My father never owned a car. That's why Rangi was so good. There were all those trips on the harbour you could go down to Waiheke and Motuihi and on the Duchess of Kawau for 7/6 and 2/6 to Waiheke.

Around the coast and islands of Auckland small groups of baches had become established, usually on private farmland. The west coast beaches of Karekare, Piha and Bethells, where the main interests was fishing, had a smattering of shacks. The bays of the North Shore such as Browns Bay and Torbay which were accessible by ferry were also becoming dotted with baches on the local farmer's land. When the Devonport Domain Board opened three areas of Rangitoto for camp sites leases there was an eager response for establishing a holiday bach with minimal capital outlay in a position so close to the city.

**Part II: Rangitoto - geography and history**

Rangitoto, a volcanic island, lies in the Hauraki Gulf at the entrance to the Waitemata Harbour. Visible from most parts of the city, its almost symmetrical shape and even, conical contours is a symbol of Auckland. Its dark outline, due to the distinctive vegetation, silhouettes it against the sky and contrasts it with the other mostly grass covered islands in the Gulf. The almost circular island, of 23 square kilometres, is surrounded by a rocky coast making safe landing difficult except for a few sandy beaches on the west side. To the east it is adjacent to Motutapu Island, where only a shallow channel, easily crossed at low tide, separates the islands.

Some uncertainty surrounds the origin of Rangitoto. Volcanologists are still unsure of the sequence and dates of volcanic eruptions.

Rangitoto’s exact history is the subject of much debate, with some experts favouring a short but active life of about a decade, about 600 years ago, while others argue that a more protracted history of intermittent eruptions commencing about 800 years ago and spanning about five centuries. However it was created, the result was a cone 259 metres high. When the volcano finally became extinct, lava that had saturated the base of the central cone cooled and shrunk. The entire top of the mountain subsided by 10 to 20 metres as a result, leaving a moat-like ring around the summit, visible today as the irregular line of raised hillocks that seem to flank the cone from whatever angle it is viewed (Cox 1989:26).

Archaeological evidence shows that the neighbouring island of Motutapu was occupied by Maori during at least one eruption but dating is still inconclusive.

The island is blanketed with a layer of volcanic ash discharged from Rangitoto at a relatively early stage in its eruptive cycle. The soils that have developed on the ash are far more fertile than those developed on the underlying clays, and undoubtedly enhanced the island's attraction for prehistoric settlers. The ash deposit is also an important stratigraphic marker, although only one occupation site has been found beneath it so far. The dating of the ash has posed problems; a mid-fourteenth century age seems most likely (Davidson 1978:327).
R.G. Law (1975:338) estimates that the most recent eruption occurred 200 to 250 years ago and the explosion which covered the Maori site occurred around 600 years ago. However, although the Maori name translates as 'bloody sky' there is no oral tradition of an eruption. Maori stories of the creation of Rangitoto are thought to explain its origin rather than record witnessed events.

**Ngatitai story of the origins of Rangitoto**

The following story is substantially as given by George Graham in a Supplement published in the *New Zealand Herald* 12.2.1927. He cites the sources as 'the older generation of men and women, descendants of the inhabitants of these parts'. It agrees, for the most part with Te Warena Taua's 1991 account. Map 1 shows Maori place names.

Long ago there lived people called Tipua - children of the fire gods. These people, 'were not as men of this world; they were giant-like, their hair was long and unkempt, their eyes were large and bulging, flashing like the paua shell does. Such were these people, who lived in secluded forest depths, caves and mountain heights. They cultivated not, hunted for birds and ate fish and mollusca. They were adept in the arts necessary for their subsistence, and lived in family groups. Being extremely strong of body, fleet of foot, and of great strength, no men of this world could withstand them.

Where now is the Lake Pupuke, formerly stood the mountain height called Te Rua-maunga-o-Matakamokamo (the mountain cavern den of flashing eyes). That tipua Matakamokamo lived there; he was one of the children of Mataaho, the subterranean god of earthquakes and convulsions. His wife was Matakerepo (darkened eyes), and her maid or maokai was Tukiata, because she was captured by her master on an early morning raid.
Now old Matakamokamo felt cold, and ordered his wife and maid to go gather flax to weave him new clothing. The flax they gathered was of inferior quality - the garments woven were carelessly made - and old Mata quarrelled with his wife. In their quarrel their fire went out. They both cursed Mahuika - goddess of fire, because despite their joint efforts they could not rekindle the fire with their fire-sticks. Mahuika complained to their parent, Mataaho, and he sent a frightful earthquake and volcanic fires to punish the quarrelsome couple. Their mountain home sank down and left in its place the deep lake Pupuke-moana. Mata, his wife and maid fled, but looking back were caught by the pursuing and revengeful Mahuika, who cast them into subterranean regions. The places where they sank are those big volcanic craters on the shores of Shoal Bay called Nga-kopua-rua - the two basins. That nearest the lake is Te Kopua-o-Matakamokamo, at Awataha. The one near Northcote is Te Kopua-o-Matakerepo. The maid disappeared with her mistress.

As the mountain home of these tipua sank, there emerged Rangitoto from the sea. Mataaho placed it there, and caused the three peaks so that these three exiles might from thence emerge and view the site of their former home. This they do when the peak of Rangitoto is hidden by rain clouds and mists, and there forever weep for their old homes.

Now these tipua had two young children, Hinerei and Matamiha, whom they had adopted. When the disaster to their home happened, these children were gathering the shellfish called kahitua at the southern end of Waiwhariki (Takapuna Beach). When Mata and his wife heard them crying on the sea-shore, they sent the maid Tukiata to go for them, warning her not to look back on her way down the mountain. Arriving at the shore, she dived in, but then, forgetfully, glanced back to the mountain summit. Hence she was turned into that pinnacle rock where she still stands near Rangitoto Beacon, Te toka a Tukiata. The two poor children also turned into rocks, which stand near the Takapuna Beach.

These rocks, Takatu and Nga-mahanaga, were formerly mauri of talismanic importance where offerings were made by fishermen or gatherers of shell-fish and wayfarers.

These two old tipua still incessantly quarrel in their underground homes, hence they cause the waters of the lake to ceaselessly overflow, and hence also the name of the Lake Pupuke-moana - overflowing to the sea.

**Kawerau story of the origin of Rangitoto**

Another tradition comes from the Te Kawerau a Maki iwi, the traditional occupants of West Auckland and the Waitakere Ranges. It is told by Te Warena Taua (1991).

**Te unuhanga o Rangitoto**

In ancient times the tohunga of the Turehu people who occupied the Waitakere Ranges would gather on Te Awhau, a high hill north of Piha where they performed rituals and discussed traditional lore - wananga. They also demonstrated their spiritual powers. After watching other tohunga demonstrate their prowess, Tiriwa, the leading Turehu chieftain of the area, decided to reveal his superior powers by moving Rangitoto, the mountain which prevented those on Te Awhau from viewing the coastline. Tiriwa strode over to the mountain and, using appropriate karakia, lifted Rangitoto onto his shoulders. In several large strides he carried the mountain eastward over the Waitakere Ranges and began to carry it out to sea. But as the cold water rose to his loins he gasped and dropped Rangitoto at the entrance to the Waitemata Harbour. For Te Kawerau a Maki this explains both the origins of Rangitoto Island and the existence of a deep chasm on the west coast known as Te Unuhanga o Rangitoto (Mercer Bay) - the drawing out of Rangitoto.
The naming of Rangitoto and Motutapu.

These stories are of the exploration of the Gulf by the Tainui and Arawa canoes after their arrival about 1350 AD. As told by Maihi te Kapua Te Hinaki born on Motuihi Island 1820 of Ngati Paoa and Ngati Whatua. Recorded by George Graham about 1894 at Te Auhanga o Aotea, Shelly Beach, Kaipara, South Head (1951).

When the waka was refloated the Tainui ventured out into the gulf and came to Orawaho (Islington Bay, Rangitoto). There they found the Arawa moored and a quarrel developed over the unwelcome attentions of Tama te Kapua to Hoturoa’s wife, Whakaotirangi. During the fight ‘Tamatekapua shed plentious blood’. Then the people intervened and stopped the duel, for they were all close relatives. It is from this that the Tainui name for Rangitoto comes ‘Te Rangi i to tongia a Tamatekapua’.

Te Warena Taua’s version is substantially the same except for the source of the quarrel which is rights of possession.

The Tainui canoe sailed to Rangitoto Island where Taikehu, a junior tohunga, ascended the three peaks and named them Nga tuatara o taikehu (the dorsal fins of Taikehu). At Rangitoto also, a duel took place between Hoturoa of the Tainui and Tamatekapua of the Arawa canoe. Both claimed to have been first to set up a tuahu or sacred altar and so lay claim to the ownership of the island. During the duel, Hoturoa struck Tamatekapua, drawing blood which ended the fight. The incident became known as Te Rangi i totongia a Tamatekapua.... The island immediately behind Rangitoto was named Motutapu by Taikehu and whose descendants lived there.

Tamatekapua’s son, Kahumatamomoe, placed a ngarara (reptile) to guard the entrance to Orawaho (Islington Bay) known as Moko nui o Kahu, and another at Pehimanawa (Home Bay, Motutapu) called Moko nui o Hei. Collectively known as Nga Moko tua moe titiro a Kahu (the two lizards of Kahu sleeping with open eyes), they turned into stone (Graham MS120 N13). A Ngatitai story recorded by Graham (1921) tells of a magical visitor from Hawaiki who ‘glided over the ripples of the waves’. After visiting Maraatiai he went to Orawaho. Not conversant with the karakia necessary to placate the ngarara he was drowned and his body washed up at Pehimanawa.

Ngatitai occupation

The following is a shortened history of Ngatitai from Te Warena Taua (1991) and personal communication.

The Ngatitai occupied most of the area around the entrance to the Waitemata Harbour. The main centre of their occupation was Motutapu where they had cultivations. They were also on Motuhurikia, Motuihi and Motukorea. The well known Ngatitai proverb likens the many canoes of Taikehu’s descendants to a shawl of herrings that cover the surface of the sea, ‘Nga waka o Taikehu, me he kahui kataha kapi tai’. The famous ancestor Tainui lived on Motutapu and his mana extended over Rangitoto. He was followed by Taimanawaiti then Kupapa who lived and died on Motutapu. His grandson Tamaki Te Ao then followed in occupation of the islands where his descendants were known as Te Uri O Te Ao. This continuous occupation over five centuries lasted until it was bought by Europeans.

The extent of Maori use of Rangitoto is unclear. It is known that they hunted birds, especially the kaka parrot which yielded prized feathers. The lava caves were used as

Beehives at Islington Bay: Ellis
an *urupa* - burial site. There is some evidence that it was used as a lookout point. A report of an expedition to the summit in the *Weekly News*, 5.2.1870 states:

The ruins - mounds, ditches etc. of extensive ancient fortifications are clearly to be traced on the summit of the central cone....

A further reference to Maori occupation was made during a Native Land Court hearing in 1866. Heteraka Takapuna of the Ngatikahu and Ngatipoataniwha tribes stated that there was a *whare* (house) at Whakapeka, a cultivated site on Rangitoto which is situated near McKenzies Bay (Monro 1866:5). A 1850s water colour by Charles Heaphy shows an extensive fishing camp at this site. There is also evidence to suggest that Maori used *kahakaha*, a plant usually epiphytic on pohutakawa but which grows on the lava on Rangitoto, to make sandals in order to get around on the scoria rocks (Cottrell 1986:20).

**European occupation**

In 1832 George Weller of Sydney bought 3,557,000 acres in the upper part of the North Island which included the islands of Rangi Toto, Motutapu, Motu Te and Motu Koreho (sic.) (Terry 1852:124). The purchase was disallowed by the Commissioners as, 'They were as ridiculous in extent, as they are most probably questionable in validity' (Terry 1852:107).

In October 1844 Rangitoto was sold twice on the same day. The first sale to Hatfield, Moore and Buckingham was signed by five Kaipara Chiefs (Turton 1882:435). Two of these chiefs, Te Wairoa and Taipau also signed another article of agreement with the brothers James and Allan O’Neill. Nothing appears to have come of either of these transactions.

The Ngatipaoa claimed ownership of Rangitoto but found difficulty selling it as it ‘was all rock’ (Monro 1866:4). In the early 1850s the Government, in need of stone for construction and road building, struck a deal with Ngati, a chief of Ngatipaoa for £15. The deed of sale of Rangitoto by Ngatipaoa to the Government was signed on 17 January 1854 (Turton 1877 Deeds No. 232).

Motutapu was first sold to Thomas Maxwell in 1843 by Ngatitai and Ngatipaoa. Maxwell was married to Ngeu Ngeu, the daughter of Tara te Irirangi a Ngatitai chief. They had seven sons. When he was drowned, along with two of his sons, before full payment had been made, a long court battle followed. It concluded that Maxwell’s portion should be held in trust for his heirs. From 1850 Europeans either leased or owned parts of the island and used it to run cattle. In 1869 the three brothers William, James and John Reid, bought the whole island excluding a small portion which was designated reserve. While the previous owners had done little in the way of improvements, running only beef cattle, the Reids immediately set about fencing and clearing the ti-tree scrub and established three homesteads - at Home Bay, Emu Bay and Station Bay.

**Rangitoto becomes public domain**

On 17 July 1890 Rangitoto came under the provisions of the Public Domains Act 1881, which stated that the island was to be governed by the Corporation of the Borough of Devonport. The Rangitoto Island Domain Board was set up to administer the island (*NZ Gazette* 17 July 1890). Those portions of the island which had already been leased for
quarrying were excluded from the reserve. It was soon realised however, that without revenue from the reserve the Domain Board could do little about protection of the island or provision of facilities. Accordingly in 1895 the Board requested the Minister of Lands to include the stone quarry reserves in the Domain as they were 'practically the only source of revenue' (DDB Minutes 8.8.1895). In 1896 nine quarry sites were included in the Domain while the other three were retained by the Harbour Board.

With this revenue the Board was able to set about providing facilities for the public. In 1897 a track from Rangitoto Wharf to the summit was completed. Fireplaces, seats, toilets and shelters were gradually built. In September 1897 the tender for a wharf was let to Mr A. White for £222.18.0. The Devonport Steam Company agreed to levy a tax on tickets as a landing tax at the rate of 1d per adult and 1/2d per child on the condition that it be 'wholly expended on the island and to our mutual satisfaction' (DDB Minutes 16.12.1897). The Pioneer Track and wharf were opened to the public on November 3 1897 with an appropriate ceremony. A large official party, including Mr J. Macky the Mayor of Devonport, made the ascent to the flagstaff which had been erected on the summit. Speeches and three cheers were given for Her Majesty Queen Victoria and three more for 'Old Rangi'. The ferry service provided non-stop transport and it is estimated that 2,500 people visited Rangitoto that day (Woolnough 1984: 18).

Licences for various other commercial activities besides stone extraction also contributed to the coffers of the Devonport Domain Board. In 1892 a licence was granted to John Stubbs to operate a saltworks at McKenzies Bay for £5 a year. Another early business venture which failed was the introduction of Fijian land crabs to be harvested for the local market. It is thought that the lack of sand for burrowing during the day probably prevented the crabs thriving (North Shore Times Advertiser 14.10.1974:10). Opossum trapping licences were issued to young men. The DDB Minute book of January 1915 records 10/- received from Sanford Ltd. for opossum skins. Beekeeping was also productive in later years.

**Camp sites**

In 1911 the Domain Board decided to lease sites to campers at the rate of £2 per year or a weekly charge of 2/6. The areas designated were Rangitoto Wharf on the southern coast, Islington Bay to the west and Salt Pan Bay/McKenzie Bay to the east. A caretaker, Mr William Pooley, was appointed in 1914.

Initially tent sites were allowed but this was stopped in 1918 as sanitary conditions were not adequate. Henceforth only permanent building sites were approved which had to be provided with adequate sanitation.

On 22.9.1911 Messers Jones and others were granted permission to erect a camp house at Rangitoto Wharf, subject to £2 rental. The conditions of lease required that buildings be removed at one month's notice in writing from the Board. The Domain Board Minute Book records that on 15.4.1913 E. Mazar de la Garde applied to erect a small smokehouse and tent at Islington Bay (DDB Minute Book 1911-16).

Mr Pooley, the caretaker, built tearooms in 1917. Previous applications to provide 'light refreshments' had been approved but not taken up as the Board's rental was considered too high for the short season. Mr Pooley's granddaughter, Ada Dixon, remembers prices as 9d for tea, cakes and scones, and 6d. for a billy of boiling water.

The rocky scoria terrain presented numerous difficulties for the cottage builders. The rocks had to be levelled for the foundation with hammer and pick axe and a long drop had to be dug for the latrine. The early baches were nothing more than sheds made of old car packing cases or galvanised iron. All building materials had to be brought by boat or barge and manoeuvred along very crude paths to the sites. Roofs too were made of iron or 'malthoid' a tar substance formed into cladding sheets. There is no water source on Rangitoto so water tanks had also to be brought to the island. Water run off from the roof filled the tanks which is reported to have tasted dreadful if the roof was malthoid.

If building conditions were difficult at Rangitoto Wharf they were even more difficult at Islington Bay where there was no wharf. All building materials had to be brought by boat and off loaded on to rocks at a very high tide or transferred to the punt and then carried from the beach at Motutapu to the building site.

In 1925 the bach-holders at Islington Bay applied to the Domain Board for financial assistance in building a jetty. They would provide the labour. It was granted, and with the assistance of a bach-holder who worked for the Harbour Board, they accomplished a very creditable structure.
The communities grew until in 1927 there were 59 buildings, 1932, 79, and 95 in 1935. The list of bach-holders drawn up in 1937 shows: 10 Beacon End, 41 at Rangitoto Wharf, 44 at Islington Bay and 7 at the quarry site at the head of Islington Bay.

Prisoners' labour

At the meeting of the Devonport Domain Board of 15 April 1925, Councillor Luxford reported that, '..in company with the Director of Prisons and the supervisor of Mt Eden Prison he had visited the Island and gone into the question of the formation of the proposed roadway. The Director of Prisons was favourably impressed with the proposal and advised that a report would be forwarded after consultation with the Minister of Justice'.

A note is recorded on 12 August 1925: 'Thanks to J. Parr for making prison labour available for Rangitoto roading. Devonport Steam Boat Co. for transport. Buildings to be arranged by Domain Board' (Devonport Borough Council Minutes 1925).

From 1925 to 1934 prisoners were housed in a camp near the Rangitoto Wharf settlement. They constructed roads linking Rangitoto Wharf with Islington Bay and McKenzie's Bay. The Board provided accommodation huts, tools, equipment and a Wichita truck. The truck was fitted with iron wheels for crushing the road surface. The prisoners chosen for Rangitoto came from the Mt Eden Prison Quarry because they were familiar with stone work.

When the road was completed in 1930 new projects were found for the prisoners. A hall was built at Islington Bay with the bach-holders providing the materials, the Domain Board the tools, and the prisoners the labour.

At Rangitoto Wharf an area was flattened for recreation and a swimming pool and public toilet facilities were built. An area was graded for a tennis court next to the Islington Summer Camps and Site Regulations, 1920

RANGITOTO ISLAND DOMAIN BOARD
REGULATIONS RE SUMMER CAMPS & SITES

1. Applications for summer camps sites must be submitted in writing to the Domain Board, together with sketch plan of proposed and sanitary convenience. Such application shall be accompanied by a deposit of 10/- as a guarantee of good faith.

   In the event of the application being granted by the Board, the deposit aforementioned will be accepted in part payment of the annual rental payable in advance, viz., 4:0:0. Failure to complete the payment of rent within one month of Board's written notification of the granting of application will be taken by the said Board to be a breach of agreement and the deposit of 10/- shall be accordingly forfeited.

2. Location of sites shall be subject to the approval of the Board's Caretaker or other appointee, and applications must be endorsed by such Officer before being submitted to the Board.

3. The location of all sanitary conveniences shall be in all cases subject to the approval of the Caretaker and other duly appointed officials, and it shall be the duty of such official to ensure that conveniences are at a sufficient distance from any camp used for dwelling purposes, so as to be no menace to the public health.

4. Any subsequent alterations of or additions to buildings used as Summer camps must not be undertaken without the written consent of the Board.

5. Subletting or leasing any Summer camp for monetary consideration is strictly prohibited.

6. No sale or transfer of any summer camp shall be made until notification in writing has been given to the Board, its consent obtained and a transfer fee of 2/6d paid.

   The Board in all cases reserves to itself the right to require the removal of any Summer camp to another site, or from the Island upon two months notice in writing being given to the owner thereof.

7. Applications should be accompanied by a sketch plan, showing site desired, with distance from foreshore, roads, and adjacent buildings.

Regulations in this form adopted in 1920.

21
Bay hall, but the prisoners were withdrawn before it could be built and it was finished by the bach-holders.

**Further amenities**

Mr Pooley’s tearooms at Rangitoto Wharf were extended to include a store which provided for the holiday makers. It also became the centre for social activities such as parties and dances. In 1931 Mr Pooley was replaced as caretaker and kiosk owner by Mr Reg Noble. When the roading was complete he first bought a car and then a bus. Now mobile he was able to visit the community at Islington Bay and later erected a store there. The bus was used to take tourists to the summit and for community excursions. A post office and telephone also operated from Mr Noble’s shop from 1936.

Both communities established a St Johns Ambulance hut. The Islington Bay bach-holders raised funds to build theirs, that at Rangi Wharf was constructed from two prisoner huts.

**The legal position of the bach-holders.**

As early as 1921 the Commissioner for Crown Lands wrote to the Under-Secretary of Lands pointing out that the baches represented an illegal breach of the Public Reserves and Domains Act and suggesting the Devonport Borough Council be advised of this breach and be given notice to have the buildings removed. Fortunately, the Minister of Lands decided no action should taken at that time.

Later, objections to the bach settlements came from other interests. In 1935 the Auckland Institute and Museum met with the Domain Board to express its concern with the devastation of the flora and fauna by introduced species brought by bach-holders. The objectors were led by Lucy Cranwell, a botanist with the Auckland Museum, whose name is still remembered with acrimony by the bach-holders.

The unique nature of the island’s flora was recognised by early botanists, for although all the species found on Rangitoto are found elsewhere, it is the situations they occupy, the forms they exhibit and the combinations in which they appear which are unique (Dr Ballance quoted by Woolnough 1984:12). ’Nowhere on the lava fields is there soil in the usual sense of the word. But where the rock is less fragmented, the countless fissures hold a humus which is fine, light, spongy, chocolate-brown, fertile and water retentive’ (ibid 1984:13). Added to this the humidity arising from the heated lava creates a mini climate some three degrees warmer than the mainland.

Destruction of the native species started with European occupation. In the manner of English gentry, and following their friend Sir George Grey of Kawau Island, the Reid brothers who owned Motutapu in the late 1800s, introduced deer, opossums and wallaby, emus and ostriches. The mammals thrived to the detriment of the native vegetation on neighbouring Rangitoto.

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**Letter from Domain Board to lease holders 1937**

**RANGITOTO ISLAND DOMAIN BOARD**

Council Chambers
Devonport, N.I.
15th April, 1937

Dear Sir or Madam,

Referring to recent discussions relative to the tenure of camp sites on Rangitoto Island, and the deputation of Shackowners which waited upon the Hon. The Minister of Lands on the 25th January last, I have been requested by the Under-Secretary for Lands to convey to you the decision of the Government as set out hereunder:-

"The whole position with respect to the occupation of portions of the domain as sites for shacks and residences has now been fully considered by Government, and it has been decided that no portion of the Island is to be set aside for residential purposes. The matter is to dealt with as follows:-

"(1) No further permits are to be issued for the erection of dwellings or for any addition or alteration to existing dwellings.

"(2) The present dwelling owners may be given a period of 20 years from the 1st April, 1937, to evacuate the Island and to remove their buildings.

"(3) No sale or transfer of existing premises is to be allowed, but permission may be granted on application by owners for the removal of such buildings or for their sale for immediate removal at any time within the period named, removals to be immediate after dwelling has been sold.

Yours faithfully,

A.E. WILSON.

SECRETARY
RANGITOTO ISLAND
DOMAIN BOARD
With similar Victorian decorative taste, the Mayor of Devonport, Mr J. Macky proposed in 1897 to, 'liven up the grim grandeur of the mountain with nasturtiums, geraniums, sweet peas and bulbs' (DBCSb 1896-1900). The folly of this was pointed out in a letter to the local newspaper.

Nasturtiums and geraniums flaunting and flaring amongst the native vegetation! Can anything be more incongruous or in worse taste? (DBCSb 1896-1900).

Nevertheless an arbour day was arranged on 8 June 1898 when the pupils of Devonport School were taken to Rangitoto for the purpose of 'planting shrubs and sowing of seeds' (RDB 1898:40). However, air and bird borne seeds of exotic plants had made their way to the island. Pine, which shaded out native saplings, was of particular concern. The bach-holders brought flowering plants, especially succulents and bulbs to beautify their plots. They too thrived on the warm humidity.

The legality of the leases, which now numbered over 100, and the preservation of the unique flora argument forced a review of the situation by the Minister of Lands in 1935/36.

On 5 March 1937 Cabinet directed that no portion of the Domain was to be set aside for residential purposes and the existing baches were to be dealt with as follows:-

That no further permits be issued for erection of baches or for an addition or alteration to existing baches.

That the bach-holders be given a period of 20 years to vacate and remove their baches as from 1 April 1937.

That no sales or transfers of existing baches be allowed.

When lease renewal for the remaining baches was considered in 1957 the then Minister of Lands agreed to a further term of 33 years or until death of the lease holder. As a result of this 95 leases were renewed. In March 1990, 34 leases were renewed for a further term of 33 years.

Between 1939 and 1946 the island was occupied under the defence Emergency Regulations and access to the island was restricted to defence personnel. Bach-holders could apply for a permit to visit their properties once a month to check maintenance.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE BEACON END

Introduction

The settlement of eight baches known as ‘the Beacon End’ at Salt Pan Bay, was the closest to the mainland but very isolated from the other two settlements. Before the road was built the only access was by small boat. The bach-holders were mostly from Devonport and so crossed the Rangitoto channel in their own small boats carrying all their supplies. The few families and single men mostly pursued their own activities. The little socialising there was centred on one outstanding character whose talent for entertaining is legendary.

This chapter is taken from interviews with three people, Mr and Mrs Boswell, and Mrs Turner. Their memories of Salt Pan Bay differ slightly. Mr Boswell knew the area well before buying his house in the early 1930s. Mrs Turner married Bob Turner who had constructed his bach long before they married. All the informants were adults when they had the baches. Mr Boswell’s bach is one of the three remaining today.

The setting

The small settlement, known as the Beacon End, straggles along the road which runs from Rangitoto Wharf to McKenzies Bay - where the eponymous lighthouse stands. It lies on the west coast facing Devonport’s Cheltenham Beach and is approximately three kilometres from Rangitoto Wharf. The nucleus of seven baches was situated on an old quarry site at Salt Pan Bay. Some distance to the northeast at McKenzies Bay was one bach and another in the opposite direction belonged to Luxford/Dumper. A beekeeper’s shed was situated about half way along towards Rangitoto Wharf.

The area has a few sandy beaches where small craft can land and before the road was built it was entirely isolated from the other settlements. Being only 1.5 kms from Cheltenham Beach across the Rangitoto Channel, it was easily accessible by row boat for picnics and fishing expeditions.

Winstones who operated the quarry in the early 1920s did not build a wharf. Barney Boswell describes how the stone was taken off the island.

The actual stone extraction was up the hill a bit and they fitted a rail system down to the water. The fully loaded cart pulled the empty one up. That’s how it was done. And when they got the stone down to the sea edge it was moved onto a barge. But that was a tricky sort of an operation. The water was too shallow normally - they could only do that at high tide so they had to have a system of a small boat towing the empty barge in at high tide and leaving it there until it was loaded with stone and then the next tide they would come in and take the barge out to a large towboat. But the towboat couldn’t get in there it was too shallow. They had a foreman who was there all the time and he had control of the small boat. To keep the small boat there all the time they put a set of rails down into the water with a trolley on that so they could float the small boat onto it and then had a capstan on top to haul the boat out of water. If the wind was to the west it would be safe. So they had the small boat on hand all the time.

The baches

Some of the baches originated as housing for quarry employees. Barney Boswell bought his bach from Wilf Cowie, the son of the quarry foreman.

It is a proper built house not a bach. It came down in sections on a barge. Jack Boswell (uncle) introduced me to Wilf Cowie, he said he was selling. I had never seen the bach but I bought it for £100. My brother had bought (one) a year or two before me.

Other baches were of more rustic construction. Captain McMurtrie’s is described as just a tin shed with very little comfort. Getting materials to the bay was difficult as Mr Dumper experienced.

Dumper filled his boat up with corrugated iron for building the bach but it fell half way across the channel.

The Boswell’s wood range came by the rubbish barge.

There used to be the gut boat going down there every day and they took the iron range down for us. We had to take it off into the dinghy.

How they came

Mr Boswell’s association with Rangitoto started in his school days when he went fishing there with his friends from Devonport. His uncle, Jack Boswell, had bought Captain McKenzie’s shed in the mid 1920s situated at McKenzies Bay near the Beacon. The Captain’s shed, built in 1914, had been used by yachtsies and fishermen.
It was a long galvanised iron shed with a whole row of bunk rooms along the one side. That’s what appealed to everybody. And it had an open fire at one end for cooking. It was an ideal site very well protected. But sometimes when I went with friends and my uncle was not there, we used to bunk in under a shelf of rock. Take your blankets in there and spend the weekend. We went by dinghy. We would row from Devonport. I was only a nipper. I had a lot of holidays there.

Many of the baches were owned by people originally from Devonport. Hank Rainie, McMurtrie, Bob Turner. Father Jones, Rex Yates, Alec and Barney Boswell. Hank Rainie, Bob Turner were family men, McMurtrie and Jones older, Rex Yates and McMurtrie bachelors.

They lived in Devonport and spent all their time on the beach. He used to go over there to the Bunk House. Rex Yates, Bob, my husband. They rowed - no outboard motors then. It was handy from Cheltenham or Narrow Neck. Then he applied to the Domain Board for a section. I think he was 16 at the time.

The people over there, except for the Boswells knew each other here in Devonport. Bob and Hank Rainie went to school together. McMurtrie lived here in Grahame St., Dumper lived at Oxford Tce. They were all from around here.

**Transport**

Most of the residents made their own way to the island by boat, but the Boswells, who had left Devonport, had to take the ferry to Rangitoto Wharf. The long walk carrying the supplies was difficult, especially when the children were small. When the road was constructed they kept a car at the wharf.

We got an old car of our own at one stage. We took it down on a barge and used that for a few years. They put two planks off the barge onto the beach. I had to get the front wheels on to the planks. There was a six or seven foot drop. I just shut my eyes and went woof. The children loved the old car. They almost learnt to drive on it. Everyone got on. Had 13 on it one day.

**Daily Life**

**Supplies**

Organising the food for a holiday was problematic and required forethought. With neither shop or refrigeration and no transport, people ‘lived off the land’ and the sea. Mrs Boswell explains how she managed.

At Christmas time we would go with my two sisters from Sydney and my mother. She could never get to Rangi quick enough. We put a big tent up. We did this for years. It was a bit awkward. It was hard thinking of food to take down there especially at Christmas with so many people. That used to keep me busy for a long time thinking about that. Things like milk for babies. Its amazing what you can put together. We had to carry all the supplies from the wharf. We seldom went to the store (at the wharf). Of course it was easier with the car.

The storage of foodstuffs was a problem always. We had to eat it quick and then catch some more. We did catch a lot of fish. They were very plentiful. And then I smoked the mullet and things like that. It suited me all right.

Barney Boswell had some practical ideas to overcome the supply problem. His bach was situated on soil, an area the more recent lava flow had not covered, where he built a garden.

Mrs Cowie, that is Wilf’s mother, she was a Maori and a keen gardener and they had a garden there with fruit trees. A million dollar peach tree when I was there and still there is a lime tree just outside the back door. I liked the idea of having a garden too. I followed Mrs Cowie’s idea. I thought that if I could have some nice beans and tomatoes and things when I go down there it would be good. So I made a garden too and things did very well. So I put pots in with wire netting. But I finally had to cover it up because of the wallabies and the blackbirds. The blackies ate it all. The possums only ate the peel of the lime, leaving the fruit white hanging on the tree. One time we were going down for three weeks and I rowed from Kohimarama (about 3 kms). I bought some chooks, tied their feet up and put them on the floor of the boat. And as I get out from here (Kohi) an easterly built up. As I got out a bit further of course the seas got bigger and a bit of water came over with the chooks lying on the bottom and they all got seasick. Their combs went white. I thought, ‘Oh yea, its about time for you boys’. So I kept on going and the further we got out it got calmer as we got the shelter from Rangitoto Island. Finally I got down to the bach with all the chooks. I took them out onto the bank and told them, ‘This is your place’. They shook their heads and walked around for a while and in ten minutes they were scratching - worms and insects galore. There was no cage. If you feed them a bit they will come back. So we had them there and all the time they were laying eggs for us which is a good help when you’re at Rangi. Then we had a week to go and have seven chooks, have one a day. Eat them for fresh food. So that was one way of getting fresh food.

The Turners used their boat to fetch supplies from Devonport.

We used to come over to do the shopping and we would do the shopping for everyone.

When the road was built Bob Turner also bought a car and Reg Noble, the storekeeper, made weekly deliveries in his bus.

It was a bit hard organising the food because you had no way of keeping anything. Reg Noble used to bring us food too. Once a week we would put the order in and he would bring it
round. We had a car an American Beauty Ford which we left at Rangi Wharf. But then we couldn’t get tires for it. When we left it at Norman’s bach he made it into a generator for his lighting.

Activities

We didn’t go inland. Went to the summit once every ten years. More things to interest you on the shore. Of course we were a young family and we had the beach there and we used to swim and fish a lot.

We lived by the tide. If the tide was coming in you were running the net for bait and then you went out fishing. Then there was beachcombing. Great timber washed up. When the boats went out they often tossed out their surplus gear. I remember once finding a big tin of dried apricots - American stuff.

There was always something to do on the beach. We used to build paths. We spent hours and hours cleaning the beach. Once there was this huge tree log washed up. We worked on it for weeks to dig it out. Eventually we managed to get it afloat. It was New Year’s Eve and we got it round to the lagoon by the lighthouse. We were responsible citizens in those days. We thought it would stay and be out of danger. We were having New Year’s Eve party and someone said the log had got away the tide had come up further than we thought. Everyone rushed out and rescued this thing. Imagine people today - they would say ‘So what. Let it go smash into a yacht’.

We put it up on the rocks. We used to love doing things like that.

Being ‘responsible citizens’ they also lent a hand at lifesaving and firefighting. The ‘Corky’ Cassidy incident already mentioned in Chapter Two, was one of many.

There were lots of people who got into strife with boats - broken motors etc. We really did a good job helping them. We did a lot of good. There were fires and we sometimes fought them for days. There were no coastguards in those days.

Fire would go down the crevices and burn the roots. Very hard to follow. Could almost walk along with it. Just have to beat it out with sacks etc. We also had to be careful with the smoke house. A spark on the ground would take over in no time. It was a permanent concern. There were bigger fires that the whole group would go to. It was always a matter of beating.

The bach-holders were aware of their responsibility to the environment.

We were instructed not to touch the trees or vegetation - edict from the Domain Board. The reason for that is that Rangi was at one time a great place to go for knees' for the boat. Clinker built boats were all wood so you went to look for knees for the stern and the bow. That was against the rules.

No one was to cut down trees especially boat builders. We were law abiding and did not cut down trees. Its just about primeval down there.

Social life

There were no organised social activities in this small community. People were not often on the island at the same time and the disparate ages and interests meant they were friendly but not communal.

Our times of getting on Rangi were varied. We never got there when we were all there. Usually only one or two baches. Christmas probably more. We had some fraternisation but it wasn’t normal as you have in other places. Never got together in the evenings to play cards. But they used to come over to us now and again and have a cup of tea. A camp fire sometimes.

We were an isolated little spot. Only seven or eight baches and usually only two or three at the most would be there at the one time. And we had different interests.

Any social activity was centred at Rex Yate’s bach. He had a reputation as a great entertainer.

We always had a big do on New Year’s Eve at Rex’s. He was the centre of the community. Its strange how things can revolve around one person. He was great. He wasn’t married. He was a great entertainer, Rex, everybody flocked to his bach. We all enjoyed his company. When he died something died there with him. It was never the same.

Our kids used to love to go up and see him and he would give them a good welcome too. He got all the kids round in a big circle and he had special stories for the kids and they used to love it. He selected some bright clean entertainment for them see, which was different from the other sort. He was the most unusual character on Rangi of the whole lot.

Characters

It was the older single men who attracted most comment by the informants.

Rex Yates was a complex mixture of loner and entertainer. He loved Rangi but did not participate in any outdoor activities.

Rex Yates was an outstanding unusual character of the whole island, single man, tall, well known entertainer in Auckland. Tall gaunt figure very much in demand at smoke concerts. Big beans they organise after football - you sit down at long tables and you have entertainment and you have beer, smoke and tell funny stories and we would all clap and go home a bit giddy. Really good shows. They were a big part of men’s lives - I think they still have them.
Rex was also in theatres. The whole audience would be seated and he would walk on the stage on his own and they would all start laughing, they couldn't help it. He had some magnetism about him. He was a wonderful entertainer and he also made up all these different rhymes - 'Oh how I envied McIntie'. He had lots of those. He used to entertain us a lot.

But he was a strange chap in that he never took anyone with him. He was a loner. He was there when we went there. He could not have built his bach as he could not hit a nail in with a hammer.

Rex Yates would have people call in on him - yachties from Devonport. They would call in on him and help Rex empty his bottles and things like that. But he never took anybody with him. He would walk round (from the wharf) and would reek with gin. And he would go there and rest and sort of sober up a bit. He never showed any evidence of the drink down there but you knew he had it because you could smell it as he came round the corner of his house. He never went swimming. Strange chap but he liked Rangi for the walk and the surroundings after his hard work during the week.

Captain McMurtrie, was a bachelor, an ex army officer at North Head and a keen scout master. The scouts would row across from Devonport and stay with him for two or three days. McMurtrie, he had a small place across the road from us. He was a Captain in the permanent forces. He was a very nice chap. Immaculately dressed all the time. He always looked as if he were going places. We didn't have much to do with him as our times of getting on Rangi differed.

Jones was an old seaman - he lived down the road here. He was a very methodical man. When he sailed everything was perfect. He trimmed the lamps at 10 a.m. every morning. Everything was done very precisely. Lived by the book. He was much older and didn't join in the fun at Rex's. Everyone used to go over and have tea with him.

Old chap Jones was an elderly fellow. His wife didn't bother about Rangi at all. He used to go there on his own in a little boat. He had a nice little spot right by the water - levelled off and he had flower pots around. He had a nice little beach.

Everybody liked Father Jones - that is what his wife called him. But he was older than most of us. He wouldn't have been interested in what we were doing.

**Conflict**

As they were seldom there together and there were no communal projects there was little cause for conflict. However, some personalities caused friction.
Vandalism

The small isolated settlement, easily accessible by small craft from Devonport, was the victim of vandalism which was a constant irritant for the bach owners. Mr Boswell’s car was destroyed, Jack Boswell’s shed at McKenzies Bay was virtually ruined and bach-holders often found their premises had been entered.

The car was vandalised by kids smashing it with axes. Same as they did with Jack Boswell’s bach. By then it was quite big with rooms off it. They smashed the place and it broke old Jack’s heart. He could not go back into it and he handed his lease back. Vandalism became a problem - they smashed our doors in.

My husband died at Rangi. It was the beginning of October and all the baches had been vandalised so they all went over to fix up the broken windows to be ready for Labour Weekend. He had a heart attack out of the blue.

Relationships with other communities

The Luxford’s were a bit further away. We never saw much of him at all. I went along there a couple of times to talk but I don’t think I saw him more than twice. He tended to go the other way. He was drawn more towards the wharf end.

There was practically no contact with Rangi Wharf - it was a long way to walk. Reg Noble the caretaker was the liaison person for the whole island and is remembered as an excellent person.

We never saw the people from the wharf. We knew them from the ferry of course. If they went out they went past our place fishing but they did not come ashore.

We went a couple of years to the children’s Christmas parties at Rangi Wharf. Never ate so much ice cream. Reg Noble organised it. He was a wonderful man on Rangi. He was first class in all respects. We all liked him very much. He worked hard to please everyone.

Fondness

Oh, yes Rangitoto formed a big part of our life really. The children virtually grew up there, all those years. We went in winter time too. My bach is on the best position on Rangi. Secluded spot. Lovely view to Devonport. In those days lots of ships going past and you could hear the music, and it is right in the middle of the fishing grounds. I could not wish for anything better.

You either loved Rangi or hated it. Avery Luxford, Sam’s wife, hated it. Some of my daughters’ friends hated it - they wanted to go to the pictures. It was a great place, but I think life has passed it by now. I don’t think people would be as interested as we were. People who love it are a type of their own. People who were there were all very much the same types. They didn’t mind not having electric light and radios. When you got over there you didn’t care what was happening in Auckland. You got away from everything.

Mrs Turner whose husband died there, does have some reservations.

I used to feel that it was a very isolated place and its damn silly to go there alone. You could slip and hurt yourself and no-one would know where to look.

At McKenzies Bay there is a memorial to Steve Shearman who went missing one day. An independent and experienced traper, he loved Rangitoto and knew it well. Although searches went on for days his disappearance remains a mystery. It is presumed he fell and hit his head and is still there on the island.

Conclusion

The Beacon End was an isolated community of individuals and families. Without access to Rangi Wharf and the store they were independent, taking all their supplies and using their own boats. Although they knew each other and came from Devonport their differing ages and interests meant that there was less communal activity than at the other two settlements. Co-operative efforts were centred on caretaking and firefighting. The social life revolved around one outstanding character who was an anomaly as he did not enjoy the outdoor life that so appealed to everyone else. The informants expressed the feeling that they loved the island because they were unusual people who could rely on their own resources and enjoy the seclusion of this unusual place.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE COMMUNITY AT RANGITOTO WHARF

Introduction

Rangitoto Wharf was the only public access to Rangitoto Island when the Devonport Domain Board offered campsites for lease in 1911. The Devonport Steam Ferry Company brought day visitors on holidays and weekends to climb to the summit of Rangitoto and walk through the bush. The holiday makers who took up leases formed a fun loving, close knit community. They were aware of their responsibilities towards each other and to the island. While the development of facilities in the late 1920s early 1930s was done with prison labour and Domain Board finance, the community nurtured a co-operative relationship with the authorities, delegating themselves as honorary warders and firefighters.

The reminiscences of former and present bach-holders dwell on the community feeling that emphasised family values, sharing and co-operation. Conflict and dissension were topics they were unwilling to talk about. Many of the friendships formed on the island remain strong and so people prefer to forget controversies which may have occurred.

Background

The settlement at Rangitoto Wharf is a ribbon of dwellings stretching along the foreshore on either side of wharf. The rocky shore which faces south towards St Heliers affords no safe anchorage.

Since just before the turn of the century Rangitoto had been a popular excursion for family picnics and recreation. The Devonport Domain Board built the wharf and paths to the summit which were open to the public on 3 November 1897. Fireplaces and seats were also provided and in 1918 a shop with tearooms was opened. The Devonport Steam Ferry Company ran a service from Auckland to Orakei, Kohimarama, St Heliers and Rangitoto on Sundays and holidays from which id for each ticket was levied as a landing tax. In an effort to raise revenue for the maintenance of facilities, the Domain Board advertised campsites for rent at £2 per year but in 1918 the Domain Board decided that temporary campers were a fire and sanitation risk and restricted site rentals to permanent structures which had to comply with certain building regulations.

The beginnings

The first camp site, approved on 22.9.1911, was leased to a group known as 'The Workingmen's Club' led by Mr Jones (DDB 1911:8). They called themselves The Rangitoto Recreation Club and had already established a 'Camping Resort' as evidenced in the invitation to a weekend in August 1911. The group pitched tents in the pohutukawa trees by a small sandy beach. A shed was built to store the camping equipment. It is told that the men would row across from St Heliers for a weekend of tramping, fishing, card playing and other relaxing pursuits.

One of the regular weekenders was Mr William Pooley, a very keen outdoorsman. When he retired he came to live on the island and was appointed caretaker. Perceiving a business opportunity in supplying a service to the weekend visitors, he applied in 1917 to the Board to open a kiosk for the weekend visitors.

The first bach-holders

Starting from the nucleus of the Workingmen's Club members news of sites to lease spread through friendships, kinships, work and business relationships.

One of the group at the Workingmen's Club bach was a ship's engineer. When his eldest son was demobbed after WWI with an army gratuity the family took up their own site and built Bach 30. With four adult children the bach was always full. The Workingmen's Club relinquished its lease so the secretary took over. He had met his wife on the island as she was from Bach 30. Another daughter of Bach 30 built a bach when she married and her mother-in-law also. The father's cousin took the site next door.

My father bought because my mothers' family was there and his mother bought then too.

One of these families invited their neighbours to Rangitoto for a holiday in 1926. They had recently immigrated from Scotland and were very attracted to the wild freedom of the island. The family bought a bach as soon as one was available and later all three children bought baches. Two of them married people they met on the island.

My Dad absolutely fell in love with the place. Within a year or two he found that he could buy a tin shed, I think he paid £50 for it.

Among the regular visitors to the tearooms were two sisters, one of whom was widowed with a young son. They came on the ferry for a Sunday outing and according to a daughter-in-law they would 'play ladies', treating themselves to afternoon tea and Mrs Pooley's famous scones. They took up a lease when they found a bach to buy.
Rangitoto Wharf location map
Rangi's longest resident came to the island as a lad of fourteen in 1922 with his employer, a grocer. A biscuit company travelling salesman who had a bach, had brought the news that sites were available for lease. The grocer and his brother built a bach together which became the delivery boy's second home until he married and built his own bach in 1936. Both his father and brother built baches and the grocer's mother-in-law bought a bach not far away.

Health was another reason for coming. A baker who suffered badly from asthma was recommended by his doctor to take a holiday by the sea. After renting a bach for a holiday he had his own built.

He got great relief from the asthma. So we had a decision to make then on whether to build there or at Browns Bay. So the decision was to build on Rangi.

A young war-widow and her only son spent many holidays with friends at their bach. When the friends decided to sell up she bought the bach as she believed that Rangi would provide an affordable holiday place for her son in a friendly and healthy environment.

**Bach building**

The families who took up sites were not affluent. Baches were very rudimentary and made of the cheapest materials. Many started as one room shacks with later additions of rooms and verandahs as finances allowed. Although the wharf was convenient for landing building materials on the island, the absence of paths created difficulty in getting materials to the site. Work on the bach took a large part of the men's time. Those with trade skills helped others. Later, when the prison camp was closed, materials and huts were recycled. The tales of bach building reflect a pride in frugality, resourcefulness and co-operation.

The original baches were tin sheds. They couldn't afford anything else. Things were tough in those days. People think things are hard these days but nothing to what it was then. We had not been used to anything better. I know I was brought up in very poor circumstances. It didn't worry me. As long as you had a billy.

My Dad bought a tin shed. I think he paid £50 for it. From then on it was all go. We got it lined. After some years Dad got it added on to. We got a front verandah and it made it very, very nice.

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The owner of the 'Olive' launches, Shorty Inglis - he was a very good skipper. To get the building material for Greene's they waited for a very high tide and brought the launch right up to the little sandy bay; off loaded in a hurry and took off again. That's how good a skipper he was.

I searched the island and looked for the stuff blown on the shore. The muck that was built into the old bach; it staggered me that it is still standing. I remember going round to where the jail site was. They used to have wooden bunks with sides. I cut off all the wooden sides and they were used for noggings. It was quite a job getting the materials down there because they weren't big boats - they were passenger boats.

There was a bach made of tram cars. The fellow was a conductor on the trams and when he retired he got one of the old trams and had it put on the front and built at the back. I think he got two of the prisoner huts. They freighted the building materials on barges which landed on the ramp in front of the kiosk.

The uneven volcanic rock surface was extremely hard to work with. One of the most difficult tasks was sinking a hole for the long drop.

If you were lucky enough to have a natural blowout (in the volcanic rock), it was the thing to build a toilet over the top of it for the long drop. Others had kerosene cans. Give it plenty of seawater you know.

The men helped each other with the heavy work, especially those who had some expert knowledge.

When I was building the bach and putting the kitchen on it was solid rock. And I worked all one day flat out. I went down at day break and worked until it was dark. And I thought, 'Well I've done practically nothing'. So I found out that old ... he'd been a miner and understood the art of dynamiting. So I bored a hole and he dynamited it for me.

To enhance their lifestyle efforts were made to improve on nature.

My father-in-law and his brother-in-law went across to Browns Island and they got a swag of mussels and brought them back and planted them on all those rocks out there and they flourished.

Our favourite swimming hole was in front of little Coogee - there's a bit of sand there. We built a little springboard out of a bit of driftwood. Beachcombing was wonderful in those days - everything would wash up.

**Holiday activities**

**Children**

The children relished the unorganised freedom of a holiday on Rangitoto.

We had some wonderful times there. We're often asked what we did for amusement. Well you could go fishing, hiking, swimming. In the morning you would wake up and go down to the wharf and see the kingfish swimming around and made spears to spear them.

We went down for six weeks of the school holidays running barefoot over the rocks the whole time. My father used to come up and work during the week and back down on Friday night.
There were plenty of children. We made our own fun. Take off and walk for miles, go for picnics. Time went quickly.

The ferries brought friends visiting for the day. They were shown around and entertained. The climb to the top was always a must.

One time I went to the top seven times. I had decided to climb to the top to see the sun rise. I came back and had breakfast and the boats started to come in and we had visitors. They wanted to go to the top, so I went with them. Came back and we had more visitors and they wanted to climb to the top. This went on all day, in the finish I found I had climbed to the top seven times. The seventh time was when I went up to see the moon rise.

We used to go gathering bottles after everyone left. They were worth 2d each you see. We used to pick up dozens of them and grandpa would put them in a box and send them back to Grahame Menzies. Quite often find a bit of money on the ground too. Because there was a sort of moss that had grown on the recreation ground if you dropped any silver it was very hard to see them. If we found 3d. we thought we were made.

Fishing

The fishing stories of enormous catches are almost legendary. Practically everyone fished. Fishing as an activity was enjoyed by all ages; fathers took their children; groups of young boys and men fished together.

My father took me out fishing. We sat all the morning and did not catch anything. Then I caught a stingray and he had to cut it off.

The main object of going for the boys was fishing. We had an 8x6 dinghy. Not unusual to catch 40 snapper in a weekend. And these were either smoked or filleted and brought back home on Sunday night. They were spread around the family and friends at home.

The fishing was marvellous. When we went down there on Friday night the first meal you would consider would be a fish meal. And there was never any doubt you would come back without fish. If you came back without fish it was the joke of the island. You were hailed as a proper mug. That's how things changed down there. In those days you could not fish with two lines - you couldn't cope with it. The fish were so plentiful.

Evening amusements

We had lovely fun. We all made our own fun. Go round to others' cottages. People would come to our bach for cards and my husband cooked fish as long as anyone would eat it.

Charades was another one that they spent hours and hours playing. Our place or anyone else's. Generally in the biggest baches. The Monroe bach was the biggest.

Community life

Wharf

The tearooms and shop, situated opposite the end of the wharf, was the centre of the community. The shop supplied the daily needs of the bach-holders and refreshment for day visitors. It was the meeting place to exchange information and gossip and the venue for social gatherings. From 1917/18 when Mr Pooley built it until they sold it in 1930, Mr and Mrs Pooley ran it with holiday assistance from their married daughter. It was then briefly owned by two other caretakers before being bought by Reg Noble in 1931. He was there for thirty years. Both these men were admired and loved in the community. Until the road to Islington Bay was finished Mr Pooley's caretaking duties were restricted to the wharf area.

We would all go down to the wharf to greet our visitors and would gather round to have a chitchat sort of thing. Then we would go into the kiosk and have a cup of morning tea. Reg was a wizard at making scones. Tea and scones and a few sandwiches.

Tearooms were used for the social events, the dances, the card evenings. It was the home of the caretaker who also ran the shop. The first caretaker was Mr Pooley who left in 1930. He spent the week as caretaker and turned into shopkeeper in the weekend. His wife came down on Friday and cooked for the weekend visitors. Her scones were famous.

As the centre for the community, the friendly, welcoming, homely atmosphere was an important element.

Did anyone describe Mrs Pooley to you? She was a little woman and she had grey rather wispy hair. Being close to the kiosk we could hear them calling out to each other. 'Walter, Walter are you there?' and he would say 'Yes, love, coming my love'. We enjoyed that.

Another thing we used to look forward to was Mrs Pooley's scones and pies. We would go down for the weekend and order for the following weekend and arrive there about 1.30 p.m. and she would have all our stuff waiting. As kids we looked forward to that.

Ada Dixon, remembers her grandparents Mr and Mrs Pooley.

When I was small Mum and Dad would both go and help. Dad would stoke the fires and Mum would serve. But Grandma did most of the cooking. When we were young we used to go down and help and she used to let us help her in the holidays. Make Elsie's Fingers or a bit of shortbread or something like that. She would never let us make the scones. That was her job. She had a round glass - always round scones. Often Grandfather would go out with the telescope as the boats come in and he would come back and say, 'Mum, the boat's well laden'. So another batch of scones would go in. She had a big double oven - coal range.
There would be droves of people. Some of the ferries would be absolutely laden. Everyone would go down to see the boat arrive and see the boat off. Grandpa was always there first with his barrow.

The ice cream came down in the boat in a wooden tub in the middle of ice and my Grandfather would go down the wharf with the barrow and put it on and bring it up to carry the stores.

There was a big ice chest and he got blocks of ice from Auckland. Then Grandpa made a safe and he put cold water in the top. It was that perforated zinc and there was hessian down the side and a tray at the bottom. The water would trickle down. Used to keep the butter in the ice chest. The main grocery things came down on Wednesday and on Saturday the vegetables and perishable goods for the weekend. Grandma would go to Auckland on Sunday night with the order. No telephones of course.

The telephone arrived in 1936. Up until then Mr Pooley had used his own ingenious method of getting urgent messages to Auckland in his role as caretaker.

As children we used to get great delight when people were left behind at night and the launch had gone. Of course people left behind had to contact their relatives to let them know if they were safe. No telephone on the island. We relied on Pooley to signal North Head. He had a morse lamp 14"x14" by about 6" wide and it had a battery light and a button on the top and something like a venetian blind in the front of it and he used to press this and send morse to North Head from the end of the wharf. Us kids used to watch. It was great. He used to wear a little pill box hat like a sea captain with a peak and gold braid on it.

Reg Noble expanded the shop and services. Once the roads were built he bought a bus in which to take tourists to the summit. He would often take the holiday makers for picnics to the summit or McKenzies Bay free of charge. Reg had a reputation as a jack-of-all trades - he repaired boats and helped the bach-holders.

He had a bus, a White with 4 cylinders. It used to be on the Devonport run. He kept it going for years and years. Incredible the way he kept it going. He also had a little truck called Suzy.

He was extremely clever with his hands. I learned quite a bit from him in the way of handling tools. He built two or three dinghies while I was there. They were all lapstreak. All done by eye. They would fit like a glove. He could solder up old tanks. People were hard up and didn't have money for tank repair. Like Mrs ... who lived on a pension. We would take the tank and solder it up. It is very difficult. Reg had perfected the art of it. I'm very grateful, now I could solder anything.

People remember the kiosk as the venue for social occasions. It was privately owned and through the magnanimity of the owners it was always available for community dances and celebrations.

We had fun at the store. Everything was centred around the store and the swimming pool built by the prisoners. Everyone went to the dances - young and old. We had back to childhood parties, vice versa dances. That is where I met my husband. There were talented people, singers and pianists always willing to play the old time dances.
There was a lot of fun. And after it was all over we would set too, clean it out and put all the tables back and away home. The old kerosene lamps and candles were used until the pressure lamps came in. They gave brilliant light.

Christmas

Over the Christmas, New Year period every bach was full. This was the time when the whole community would be together and affirmation of community and unity was manifest through organised fun and celebrations. Although the events were organised there was an emphasis on simplicity and incorporation of things and activities which were uniquely 'Rangitoto'. My informants' holiday memories are coloured by these experiences.

Hundreds of people would be there at Christmas. There were forty seven baches at Rangi and they all had families - five at the minimum. Easily add up to 300.

The thing that used to amaze me was how the old lady and the people of her own age used to improvise. For the Christmas holidays there would be a big family. In order to keep the turkey fresh they would take it down live and they would feed it down there. They had to bring all the stuff down there. They did all their cooking on an open fire. And they were Christmas dinners believe me. All the adult children with their wives. There were no real tracks there and you had to stagger across rocks to get to their bach from the wharf. One time the chap who was carrying the pen with the turkey in it lost his balance and the poor old turkey went into the water in the crate. So many tales to tell - it's quite endless.

Christmas celebrations focused on the children.

We used to have a function for the children every Christmas, a great big party and one of the people would dress up as Father Christmas and he would give the presents to the children.

But adults enjoyed themselves too.

I'll never forget one Christmas ever. (She) got the bright idea of gathering all the kids up and going round to sing carols at each bach. Because I played guitar I got landed with it. 'Silent Night' over and over from bach to bach. Anyway we got round as far as Eric's - he had pressure lights in the trees and two long tables laid out with smoked fish, bottles of beer, mussels, bread and butter. This was midnight. There was Charlie and my wife and quite a few others. We were of course absolutely parched. We finished telling yarns at 5 am. and staggered back around the track.

New Year festivities

New Year's Eve was usually celebrated around a barbecue on the flat area or a picnic on the summit. This was followed by a party in the kiosk and 'first footing'.

At New Year's we would have a shared meal on the flat part. Jim had orders for smoked fish. We would eat and amuse ourselves until it was 12 pm. We would sing all the old songs and new songs. Some danced. Then after midnight we went visiting.

On New Year's Eve we would go down to the barbecue and gather around there and all the younger ones would hike to the top and come back and have the barbecue. Then down to the store for Auld lang syne. There was Mrs .... who played the piano. She was rather a wizard on it.

Their big thing was on New Year's Eve. She was always asked to sing, 'The Bells are ringing the old year out and the New Year in', a well known English song. Starts off, 'The stars were shining brightly'. If she wasn't asked to sing it she got very upset.

On New Year's Day the fun continued.

On New Year's morning all bach-holders with a dinghy would meet at the wharf for a fishing competition. Depending on the tide. You had to go out fishing for a certain amount of time and be back at the swimming pool area with your catch. Then every boat would have their fish counted and there would be a prize for the greatest number of snapper, the largest snapper, the longest fish and so on. The booby prize was the lid of an old dunny. It was a lot of fun. The fish were raffled off. For the longest fish a flag was made by the previous year's winner. Got some great flags. The flag would be anything up to 2 ft. long and 18" wide. There was a shield donated by my brother. And we had cups too. That was a marvellous day - there was a wonderful community spirit.

This was followed by the traditional fancy-dress ball.

Eric and I won the fancy-dress ball one year. He dressed up as an Arab and the beauty of the whole thing was you had to utilise everything you had at the bach. He wrapped himself in a sheet and got some shoes and put points on them. He really looked the part. And as a child I went as Trader Horn. I had a pith helmet and white trousers and white shirt. I borrowed a leopard skin from the people next door. Eric and I won first prize. We had a lot of fun in those days.

We had fancy-dress parties around the pool. Had to be something from the island. I went as a fishergirl. 1 dressed my friend as a pineapple. Eric went as Robinson Crusoe and Goff as Man Friday.

I went in all whites with a straw boater and a black face - pierrot, something like that. Reg came out with a tea cosy on top of his head.

Other celebrations

On other occasions people celebrated the community sense of belonging.
They would find out it was somebody's birthday so it was spontaneous. Everyone would arrive en masse. And nobody would ever bludge. Everyone brought so much food. So many people they would have to shift the furniture out of the place to fit everyone in.

Someone may have been sick or not come down to the island for a while and they would be greeted on the wharf by everyone. We would line the whole wharf with beer bottles and we would have a big ceremony as they came off the boat. The poor people would wonder what had happened.

We hadn't been down for about six weeks and we arrived down there the whole wharf was done up with toilet paper and welcome home. My wife hated leaves, so they got as many leaves as they could find - buckets and buckets full and strewed them everywhere. It took us two days to get them out. It used to be a joke my wife would be sweeping up leaves all the time. We would go for picnics to Mckenzies Beach. Some would take the bus and some would walk. Everyone shared everything. Men would go out and catch fish and we would build a fire. When the fire was red hot coals they cleaned the fish and covered it with wet newspaper and put it in the coals. In 15 minutes it was beautifully cooked.

Co-operation

Co-operation was a prominent theme of people's recollections. The community was characterised by unity and friendliness.

If there was anything being done people would say, 'I will come along and give you a hand'. Yes, we all helped each other in that respect, and they still do.

People helped with bach building especially when pouring concrete for slipways. If there was a tradesman there he would help a bit with plumbing or something like that. Alf was one of those chaps who could put his hand to most things. We had a very friendly community.

Sharing resources

Even those who had a little more - were a bit more affluent than others - had smokers and that. Everything was freely available except the boats. A lot of the people down there had virtually nothing. You never mistrusted anyone. Everything was taken at face value and what was mine was shared.

There were some who couldn't fish because they didn't have a boat. And we would know them and you would have your barrow and it was nothing to see a person coming round with a barrow load of smoked fish. No-one ever kept them all themselves.

It was all incredibly communal. Everything that anyone had and didn't matter what it was when you ran out it was all share alike. Food, clothes, bedding, paint. Everyone was only too happy to help. It was a wonderfully close knit community.

The 'then young' express their appreciation of the communal feeling and concern for others which was part of their upbringing on Rangitoto.

The greatest thing that I will ever hold is that as families down there they instilled in we (sic), great concern for the island, concern for safety, concern for ourselves. That if anyone was hurt, or shipwrecked or in any way distressed it was our job to care for them and feed them and clothe them. Because we got the place so cheap. And also when the boatloads went it was always the job of all the youngsters to pick up everything that was left.

Alcohol

The use of alcohol was responsible and mostly restricted to the baches, although there seems to be some differing stories about this.

Although Grandpa controlled things it was Grandma who actually banned alcohol from that night they nearly got lost coming back. She was the drum major. They never had alcohol on New Year's Eve after that.

Some one used to make home brew. Half of them used to have home brew and when you had the function they would come with the home brew. It was drunk at the dances but I never saw anybody drunk.

In some of the baches they were heavy drinkers and they were full of remorse on Sundays. They wouldn't feel like it (building). Instead of splitting rocks they would have a splitting head.

Prisoners

The prisoners were housed in a camp close to the Rangitoto settlement between 1925 and 1934. Although they were not part of the social community, the prisoners' work contributed much to community amenities and people reciprocated when they could. Besides building the road to Islington Bay and the Beacon the prisoners improved facilities at Rangitoto Wharf which benefited the residents and tourists alike. They built the swimming pool, made the paths, helped with bach sites, flattened out an area for a children's playground and built an archway in front of the men's toilet. One of the two warders was named Buchanan. There he met Jimmy Buchanan's family and married his sister, Rose. It is a family joke that she agreed to the marriage because she did not want to change her name.

At the time the baches were built the prisoners were there and they used to flatten out the sites for the baches to be built on.

They had old Wichita trucks. My brother-in-law drove the truck and took the prisoners to the road to build it. In the summer
time of course if the tide was in they would have a swim. Then up to the camp and the meal was served for them. The local residents over there would catch the eye of some of the prisoners and go down the store and buy a couple of ounces of tobacco and bury it under a rock. The prisoners would get it.

The old lady used to make pies and tarts and I would go around while they were working - they were nice kids really and if you showed them a bit of consideration they really appreciated it. And I would say if you look under that rock you might find something that would help you for your morning tea. The warden there was a humane bloke too and I would say, ‘I’ve left something down there’, and he would say, ‘That’s alright as long as there is a bit for me’. We became friendly with a lot of the young fellows down there, as much as you were allowed to become friendly.

When the prisoners left several of the huts were put to use by the residents. The St Johns Ambulance hut was made of two prisoner huts put together. Others were used as extra rooms and tool sheds.

Organisation

Over the years there were several committees set up with various names - Cottage Owners, Shackholders, Bach-holders - to liaise with the Devonport Domain Board, raise money and organise functions. The Domain Board was responsible for providing facilities for the tourist visitors in the way of upkeep of paths, seats, toilets etc. It funded the building of the swimming pool and it was through the Domain Board that the prisoners were brought to the island. The relationship between the bach-holders and the Devonport Domain Board was extremely important to the community.

It was a great arrangement we had between ourselves and the Domain Board and it was a very friendly relationship. The reason was that there was no money to do anything on the island and the small rental went right back into certain things that had to be done.

One of the most important events we remember down there was the visit we used to have from the Devonport Domain Board every year. We decided that we would make it a gala day for them and we would put on a big function for them. They used to really love it. We used to teach the children to swim in the pool and we would ask the Mayor of Devonport to give out the certificates. Of course they couldn’t spend the entire day with us because they had to go from there to Isi Bay. The women used to cook the scones on the open fires and smoke fish. The kids would collect cockles and pipis and those were cooked over the open fire on corrugated iron. Everyone took part. We would prepare for days before.

The leader of the community in the latter 1930s and 1940s stresses the mutual benefit of the good relationship between the residents and the Domain Board. He believes that efforts made by the residents were appreciated by the Domain Board and were a contributing factor in the Board’s defense of the bach-holder’s rights when the Minister of Lands reviewed the legality of their leases in 1935. One of the principal objectors to the bach leases was Lucy Cranwell, a botanist at the Auckland Museum.

We built a very close relationship with the Domain Board. I always emphasised that we were not there for ourselves alone. We are here to make ourselves honorary wardens and they recognised that in an unofficial way. We were more or less a lifeguard service around the island because it is a very treacherous island. I couldn’t tell you the number of times people have been wrecked on the island and if it hadn’t been for the bach-holders they would have drowned. One of the great advantages with people living down there, they knew the foreshore so well that they were able to negotiate it and get to people.

We used to invite certain members of the botanical society down and find out from them what they considered was the trouble as far as the botany was concerned and we volunteered to help eradicate it. We worked in with everybody and it was that that enabled us to be in the situation we are in today.
We invited the Superintendent of the Devonport Fire Service down. He said, 'You have a real fire bug down here'. I never realised. 'The Superintendent said if something isn't done to protect Rangi from fire you could loose the whole island. There are little holes and channels. The stuff burns underneath and 400 to 500 yards away another fire would start'. So we got a stirrup pump but of course there was no water. One time some visitors had lit a fire and the visitors had gone. Smoke started to billow out and we had a real fire on our hands. The pool was full. So we summoned the island. All the kids and everybody brought buckets and we formed a bucket chain gang. One bloke pumped and Reg went round and fought the fire with the hose. They just about emptied the pool by bucket. It was quite a feat. And old Reg stood there like a champion that he was and he poured water into the thing. It was fortunate that it was one of the few times of the year that all the baches were occupied.

Community conflict

My informants were cautious in talking about conflicts in the community. Most denied any arguments at all, remembering only a harmonious, untroubled time; those who did speak about conflict dismissed the incidents as insignificant. With so many family relationships within the community and long standing friendships which exist today it is understandable that people were reluctant to bring up past differences.

The re-forming of the associations under various names gives credence to the belief that there was more conflict and dissension than people were willing to talk about. Some bach-holders did not take an active part in the associations but all belonged and paid an annual subscription.

I didn't get mixed up with the Bach-holders Association because in small communities you know what happens. There would be fall outs and disagreements. I didn't go to Rangitoto for that sort of thing. I went there to enjoy the place. There were a few little upheavals - it happens now and again in small communities. I believe Isi Bay had a lot also. It was called the Cottage Owners Association and all sorts of things. Different ones would rename it you know. Oh, yes they had their little fallouts but I kept right out of that sort of thing. I won't talk about quarrels, too many relatives. They are all intermingled. This marriage in that family, you know.

The Chairman of one of the associations explains a little of the sources of conflict.

Before I was on the committee they had their committee. The president and the secretary of the committee had become real dictators. We had to hold the functions when they wanted. Couldn't hold one on your own. If you wanted to hold a function for the children they said, 'No, you can't hold it'. Of course we got a little bit cross. Some of them were not the original people, they had come down later. But old jealousies came in. But they didn't remain long. They isolated themselves as these people always do. For a little while it was a sour taste in their mouth but they soon found out. It's a great tragedy when these things happen, but you always get somebody.

We had one or two contentions but we quickly overcame that. The people who became very, very nasty we found left the island. Couldn't stand the heat.

One group became very agitated over Reg Noble and started to make all sorts of complaints about him and made all sorts of statements that weren't true. Of course when I challenged them they couldn't actually support them.

One president of the Rangi Welfare Society had the bright idea - the grandiose idea of buying these posts with arms out and hanging lanterns off them and putting them round from the wharf to the kiosk. He spent all the funds the society had and everyone was very upset about it. Needless to say he wasn't president the next year. What a character.

Characters

My informants talked of people who stood out in the community, some because they did not fit in with community values, others just because they are different. Many of them were English.

Smith was a character. He came from England and had communist leanings. He lived there for a number of years. They used to call him the loudmouth because he had a laugh like a hyena and no-one really had much time for him. He was a non-jointer. He was a very dominating person; little but dominating.

After a certain number of years Mrs Smith couldn't handle the boat. So he used to go down on his own. He kept going down there until they put the rent up - it wasn't very much - but he was so incensed about it he wouldn't pay. He tore the place down and left. He died a couple of years after that.

There was a chap who set his place on fire to get the insurance. There was quite a furorou about it. Times were hard not long after the Depression.

The Newtons came from the Midlands and they were broad lankies. We had quite a lot of English, Smithy, Buchanans, Sharps, lots of people came from England. Pooley too. The Newtons loved their tummies - they weren't wealthy. And their big thing was to go down there - out on the mudflat by the kiosk. And they would gather a kerosene tin full of cockles and cook them up and have a big beano. And these things were as tough as old boots - the cockles. I think old Jack would have a few beers. They loved cockles.

Jack Newton and his wife were English. They had a bach which was literally just a tin shed. I didn't have a great deal to do with them except I had a little bantam hen up here in Auckland. It came to the point where I really was not looking after it as it should have been. So Dad says, 'I know someone who would like that. I'll take it to Rangi and give it to someone who would like it. I'll give it to Jack Newton'. And this is what he did. And here I am thinking it was going to be well looked after. And I think it was well looked after - it was in the pot the following day. I hunted high and low and the little hen wasn't there at all.
Extraordinary characters stand out in people's memories. Some people are remembered because they were interesting.

Phil Lewis was a real theatrical man. He had a very nice baritone voice. He was an Englishman and he came out here with one of the opera companies. He was a sheetmetal worker and he built himself a copper car - it was all scrolled. It was part of his advertising gimmick. His wife was quite a character - she ran a big business in town - a hatters or milliners.

Major Cardell was clever with his hands. I used to enjoy going round to see him because he used to make trout fly fishing rods out of split bamboo - they were a work of art. He was innovative too - he made himself a special shower out of kerosene tin. He loved going up to town and getting on the booze and coming back. He was always referred to as the major cos he had an army style moustache and when I saw him he was sitting in a chair outside in behind this big green wooden parrot that he used to stick up in front of him. It was really quite something to see.

Tommy Ward was one of the gang that used to play cards in the Workingmen's Club. He was another character. Reg used to have the contract to clean the tracks. He employed Tommy. Tommy would walk up to the wells where the ground was nice and soft and take an alarm clock with him and go to sleep. The alarm clock would wake him up and he'd come back down. Got paid for nothing.

Most of my informants still have their baches at Rangitoto and visit frequently. The friendships they made there have lasted and are very important to them today. Everyone feels it has been a significant part of their lives; it is a special place for special people.

I feel it has been a great privilege for us to have been on that island. Not very many people have had that privilege as we have had. I really feel that way because we all love the island.

The only people who don't like Rangi don't like themselves. They start fidgeting from the time they arrive. Rangi brings you back down to earth and it still does it for my children. And that is the nicest thing.

They were really lovely times. We all became very close you know and even to this day. But we are gradually all going. Eric's wife is gone, she was my very dear, dear friend. Rangitoto was something very special, really special.

I often wonder what would have happened if I hadn't gone to work for Mr Greene. It (Rangitoto) was a big slice of my life. I just love the place. I go down there now just to be there. I've been going there since I was 15, that's 70 years. They are all my friends. You either get the Rangitoto bug or you don't.
It is rather a strange island. You either like it or you don't. But, Oh, it fell right into my lap. I loved it. Millionaires would pay millions to experience the same thing we got for £5 a year. We had some wonderful times there.

Conclusion

The community at Rangitoto Wharf existed in close contact with 'officialdom'. It benefited from the facilities provided by the Devonport Domain Board - the roads, swimming pool, wharf, paths - and gave back in kind by firefighting, boat rescue and cleaning up. The caretaker lived with them and became part of the community, allowing his kiosk to be used as a social venue and helping the bach-holders with many practical jobs. With the daily, sometimes three times daily ferries, the community was never isolated from the outside world and never lacked for supplies.

The community valued co-operation, inclusion and sharing of work and material things. They felt Rangitoto was a special place and expressed this in their communal festivities at New Year's and other times. All my informants expressed a great and enduring fondness for Rangitoto, the people, the community spirit and the way of life.
CHAPTER SIX
THE COMMUNITY AT ISLINGTON BAY

Introduction

The isolated settlement which developed at Islington Bay in the 1920s was based around a nucleus of kinship and friendship groups. The absence of amenities such as a wharf, regular launch service, paths or shop, engendered a self-reliant, interdependent community. With limited resources and difficult terrain the families relied on each other for cooperation and assistance when building their baches. The same spirit of working for communal benefit was also apparent in the building their own wharf. They enjoyed the outdoor pursuits of fishing, walking, picnicking and swimming. Their New Year’s celebrations were focused on fun derived from the simple pleasures that the island afforded.

In the early 1930s the tenor of the community changed. The completion of the road connecting Islington Bay to Rangitoto Wharf heralded the development of new facilities and the arrival of more affluent people. The informal group organisation was transformed into the Shackholders Association in 1933. These, and other factors, led to a less cohesive community.

This chapter, which covers the early years in detail, is derived from interviews with children of original 1920s families. They fondly remember the holidays of their childhood and spoke at length of the change in the community which came about in their young adulthood.

Location and background

Islington Bay, on the eastern side of Rangitoto, is formed by the coasts of the two islands, Rangitoto and Motutapu. It is a long inlet of about one kilometre from the entrance to the conjunction of the two islands. At high tide the channel between the two islands was navigable by yachts and launches; at low tide it is easily crossed on foot. The northern side, known as Gardiner’s Gap, is a wide flat area, completely dry at low tide. It supports large beds of shellfish - pipis and cockles. Lying approximately south-north the Bay is sheltered from both the prevailing southwest and northeast winds. Formerly known as Drunken Bay, it was used by captains of coastal vessels as a sobering up station for their crews rounded up out of the Auckland pubs, before they left the Hauraki Gulf. A navigational aid, called a compass dolphin, was situated at the opening of the Bay. Captains could verify their compass by recording bearings of the summit of Rangitoto as the vessel turned though 360° around the dolphin.

At the entrance to Islington Bay the Harbour Board owned a quarry for the extraction of stone to build the western tide deflector. This quarry was in use in 1911-12 and again in the early 1920s. Up to eighty men were employed, some with families. A school, a wharf and shop and a large cook house provided for their needs. The quarry was not part of the community of holiday makers as it was some 800 metres away, but some of the long time employees who had rights to the company houses there, participated in the community activities.

Motutapu was bought by the brothers William, James and John Reid in 1869. They improved the land by fencing and cutting down the ti-tree and established three homesteads - Home Bay, Emu Bay and Station Bay. In the 1890s they employed John Craig as farm manager. He came from Scotland with his family of four children and his wife’s brother, Mr Trotter, James Reid, the only surviving brother married, late in life, Eliza Craig, John Craig’s daughter. They had two daughters, Florence and Helena, but James died while they were very young. When the bach leases were let, John’s son, Andy Craig, was farm manager and had a homestead above Gardiner’s Gap on Motutapu.

Islington Bay is referred to by the community as the Bay or Isi Bay. Gardiner’s Gap is often called the Gap. Motutapu is referred to as Motutap.

The beginnings

The sheltered anchorage at Islington Bay had become a favourite destination for Aucklanders with launches and yachts who enjoyed the lovely beaches of Motutapu. Popular for picnics and fishing, it was not accessible to the general public by ferry as there was no wharf.

Although the Devonport Domain Board opened up Rangitoto to campsite holders in 1911, the first identifiable application for a site at Islington Bay is recorded as E. Mazar de la Garde in April 1913. A few years later, W. Davidson’s application for a ‘small whare’ at Islington Bay was approved by the Board on 1 September 1914. The annual rental was £2 and subject to be removed at one month’s written notice (DDB 1911-16).

Local knowledge has it that the earliest bach at Islington Bay was owned by Mr Mons, a Frenchman, who later moved it over to Motutapu. However, it was not until after the First World War, in fact the early twenties, that interest in Islington Bay really started.
Islington Bay location map
How they came

The core of the first leaseholders at Islington Bay were friends and family of the farm owners on Motutapu. The Horner family, long time friends of Andy Craig, camped there every summer for ten years before building a bach in 1923. Another family was introduced to the island by their son who worked on the scows which took the rock from the quarry at the head of the Bay to Auckland. He obtained permission from Andy Craig for his family to camp in the summer of 1922. The family, with eight children, were so delighted that the father immediately applied for a site and started building with his adult sons the following year.

Mr Horner belonged to the Masonic Lodge and it was through this association that at least half a dozen of the early bach-holders came to the island.

We used to go to the fig tree camping 1913-23. Then we noticed they were building the odd bach and my father thought, 'Mother doesn't like the launch it rolls too much. We'll get a bach'.

We were one of the first ones. There was a little nucleus - we all built about the same time and each one helped the other. All the men were very friendly. They all knew each other before they came down. My father was a Mason and I think several of them were too.

Most of the families who took up bach sites were related through family or friendship, others were workmates. William Ellis owned a launch and had been visiting Islington Bay for many years when he bought a one room bach from Mr O'Gara in 1924.

His wife's sister and family took up the site next door and his brother-in-law, a builder, also found a site. The builder's business partner found a suitable spot and together they built many of the later baches. Two single women spent many holidays with the Ellis family before building their own bach.

Building the baches

The main consideration in choosing bach sites was access to the foreshore as before the wharf was built in 1925, people and materials were transferred from a hired launch to a punt. The initial sites were along the channel separating Rangitoto from Motutapu. These were chosen first because it was navigable by launches at high tide and close to Motutapu beach where the punt was drawn up. When the wharf was built, it became the access point and more sites were available on the Bay side. Baches filled in the 'basin' foreshore and then around the corner westward. The later development of inland sites was made possible by the road which arrived at Islington Bay in 1933.

First sites were the ones around the edge. We chose the site for its proximity to Motutapu and we could get a dinghy through the channel.

Father chose this site because it was closest to the wharf. We preferred that side to the other because it was so far from the wharf. Father had such short times, he could be at the Bay so he chose that site.

Lacking funds for new materials or contracting a builder, the families erected their baches from second-hand materials themselves, with help from friends. The first difficulty was getting the materials to the site, the second, leveling the lumpy volcanic terrain which had first to be cleared of bush. These tasks were approached with a resourcefulness born of necessity.

Dad hired a boat to take down the material to the flat rock - the tanks etc. Cost 30/-.. They would wait for a good tide and they would back it into the flat rock outside. The timber was from china cases and later demolition timber - a lot of old kauri. The roof was malthoid - a tar substance which made the water taste.

Dad did the original but later I helped to take a couple of rooms from City Dyers from Dominion Road. I took all the kauri timber down to the Bay. We put it up one New Year's Day. My wife was painting as we built. The bach grew from one room.

Reasons for choosing a holiday home at Islington Bay

The people who came to Islington Bay sought an outdoor holiday, but holiday homes were usually beyond the means of families of this primarily workingclass group. Renting a site without the large capital outlay for a section presented a solution. Furthermore, as the sites were 'campsites' it was possible to start small and add on to the structure as finance allowed. The Devonport Domain Board was responsible for approving all building plans and alterations.

The family thought it was good that we had somewhere healthy to be. We always went there for holidays and hardly ever stayed in town for the weekend.

We built because it was cheap and possible for a large family and we were able to build one room at a time. The rental was about £4 a year. Most people were in the same boat because even the people who had their own business and were in employment were not as affluent as they had been or would be later on.

Not a lot of people had holiday homes. Generally speaking to have one you would have had to have quite a lot of money to buy the section.
Davidson, when he came back from the War, he put a bach up. They might not have had much money. It was put up with all sorts of galvanised iron.  

Coney’s bach was brought to the island. It used to be Masefield’s gardener’s cottage in Herne Bay.

A lot of the places down there were old car cases and pieces off the wrecks around the back. Those wrecks were rabbited for years.

Grandfather approached Mr O’Gara who owned the site where our bach is now and convinced him to sell it. He paid it off in installments. Just a one room place. I was told it was originally a horse stable. Almost immediately started altering the place to make it a little more habitable. We used to get stuff from the wrecks at Boulder Bay. We had the door to the toilet and one of the bedrooms from the ‘Rarawa’.

In 1922 we built ours. We asked a carpenter friend to help us with the frame which was erected in a weekend for £10. It was planked with timber from motortruck cases.

Daily life during the early years

In speaking to the people who were children and young adults in the 1920s about the daily life at Islington Bay, I found that they talked about a time when family values of respect for each other and co-operation were important. They talked about the excitement of getting away from Auckland city for Christmas, the summer holiday feeling and the freedom. There were certain chores to be done but mostly it was endless days of outdoor fun. Yet their memories of their parents’ holidays are of the continual work of building and upgrading of the baches, cooking and providing for the family in the way of fishing. Many of the activities, both work and social, were communal and family occasions.

The children

Preparations for the holiday began weeks before in Auckland. Trevor Horner remembers the ‘gear’ being taken out of the shed, cleaned and got ready for the summer. He also recalls with fondness his mothers’ preparations.

Before Christmas we would polish up the copper and then Christmas puddings were put in there and boiled and all hung up outside until we went to the bach; and she used to bake cakes.

Mother packed everything up at the beginning of summer. The coalman transported it all to the wharf on his truck. Mother counted the parcels and I had to count them on and off the truck and the boat.

On the island, the first thing to do in the morning was to fetch the milk from the farm on Motutapu. Children had to cross the channel which was sometimes difficult if the tide was high. Once when a storm blew up and the high tide was running through the channel at great speed, a young girl and
her brother were stranded on the Motutapu side. Their mother ran up and down the path on the other side shouting instructions on how to get across safely. But often the reward for fetching the milk was the cream off the top after Grandma had scalded the milk on the wood range.

The day revolved around the tide; swimming, collecting cockles and pipis, climbing to the summit, going for walks on Motutapu, but first there were chores.

We had to go once a day for wood, always had to make sure there was plenty of wood for mother.

The children had to carry their fair share of the load from the wharf. We had a little wheelbarrow that we kept under the bach and we had to rush around to the bach and fetch the wheelbarrow.

For the boys there was adventurous activity such as fishing and hunting.

There used to be a little creek that has since disappeared, with quite a deep pool where we used to catch eel and fresh water trout. And in those days Motutapu used to have thousands and thousands of rabbits and I spent quite a lot of time shooting rabbits. I had a little -22 rifle and I used to go over there and keep the people fed in rabbits.

Max and I would go swimming or fishing practically every day. Or we would go floundering with a spear. Sometimes Max would go out fishing with the boys and I would swim with my girlfriends. There wasn’t a time I felt lonely

We used to have a lot of fun with opossums and wallabies. We had a wallaby trap and the fun was to take the wallaby to the middle of the beach when the tide was out. Everyone would gather round and watch him run.

Children’s games always involve playing house for girls and fights for boys.

The young ones of the same age mixed together. We worked around the tide. We knew if the tide was in you would be swimming and meet there. But if the tide was out we would wander around and see someone and decide to go for a walk or play in the bush at the back of the house. We girls used to play dolls house and have tea parties. Things kids have always done.

On Motutapu there were these karaka trees with yellow berries. We used to have fights with them. We’d dig little trenches in the sandbank - the sandbank was better when I was a boy - at least it seemed so.

The grassy slopes of Motutapu were a favourite place for sliding down on nikau palm leaves. Some fathers made little sledges for their children. Most families had dinghies, sail boats or canoes so they all learnt to row and sail.

I had a little punt thing I played around in all day. I could catch fish off her. Sprat, big sprats as soon as the tide came in. What my sister did I couldn’t tell you.

We didn’t have a boat as such. We eventually found about a quarter of a life boat, the bow or the stern, I don’t remember. Max was mad on sailing and we brought this damn thing back. Dad gave us a hand and we put a transom in it and a mast.

There was also the beachcombing.

The orange boats would come to the back and dump the oranges. We used to go down there and pick them up. They were perfectly sound. In those days you needed them. There were onions too but they didn’t interest us children. Why they dumped them I don’t know.

When I was a schoolboy, fourteen or fifteen, we paid for the holiday one year by going out to the wreck and getting all the brass off it. We sold all the brass.

Some other money making projects were not so successful.

We had a scheme at one stage where we reckoned we were going to preserve the rabbit skins. I can remember coming home with rabbits all round me - their heads up under my belt - blood from the waist down. We could never make the skins soft. We tacked them out and made some wire frames but I’m afraid our expertise wasn’t enough.

There are inevitably wet days in every holiday when children must be cramped up indoors. They played ludo and snakes and ladders did jigsaw puzzles and created their own fun.

Exploring in Lulu: Ellis
If it were a wet day kids would come round to us or we would go to them and have an impromptu concert. Someone sang, someone danced, someone said a poem. They were very family families in those days down here because it didn’t matter what age you were everyone joined in. The little ones would do their bit and Mum would join in if she thought she had sufficient talent. We did them on the verandah. There were never any organised performances.

In the evenings they amused themselves with cards, walks, visiting other baches and singsongs.

In the evenings we would sit and knit perhaps but mainly we would play card games. Mother loved 500. We all learnt to play. We had the gramophone which we would sing to.

One of the things in those days, people on boats had mouth organs or violins. Someone would start and others would join in. The whole Bay would start and everyone on shore would sit on the path or slips and sing too. It was lovely.

Children played unsupervised but there were a few rules to ensure their safety. No-one was to swim alone, no-one was to collect wood alone, or go for walks alone.

**Mothers**

Housekeeping without a local shop and with limited water was a challenge for the women who were often there alone with their children. Cooking in a camp oven and over an open fire, keeping food fresh and hand washing clothes were all time consuming. The first thing was to organise supplies for a six week holiday.

We had to take all the basics like milk powder, flour and sugar. We could live off fish. Rabbits stewed in the camp oven. Mum made soda bread in the camp oven. Dad sent down meat and bread at the weekends. If we ran out we just made do. If you ran out of butter you ran out of butter and just had jam.

Mothers’ daily life was not much of a holiday. When she first went there we had just an open fire on the ground - bars across a couple of stones, camp oven and iron pots. She cooked root vegies in salt but the other vegies were awful in salt water. Potatoes were fine but cabbage and beans and things were dreadful. She always scrubbed out the cottage with salt water too. We had wonderful things out of the camp oven. We had to carry the water for washing clothes too. We had to dry them on the bushes. Mother did the clothes in a tin tub - no iron of course.

Grandma was never still, always had something to do. The women would go out and get the shellfish, gathering the pipis.

The young ones can’t believe how we kept food. We used to go down there for six weeks. We had fresh milk each day. We had a safe hanging up in the tree. We took a ham down every Xmas and hung it high in the trees. Flies don’t touch anything over 10 feet and possums couldn’t get down the wire.

It was hard to keep things fresh. Kept ants out with cups of water. Had to be careful opening the safe to keep the blow flies out. We would get a muslin cloth and wet it and hang the butter up in it to keep it hard. Evaporation of water chills down the atmosphere.

Mother had to cook over the wood stove. She would get a bit fed up cooking all day for a crowd of teenagers and early twenties who all had hearty appetites. I can remember once, she must have had a great deal of potatoes and wondered what the hell else to give us. We had a who could eat the most potatoes competition. Jack Harris and I were top.

**Fathers**

For the men there was the ongoing building and expansion of baches, pathways and boat ramps when they weren’t occupied with fishing. A great deal of ‘kiwi ingenuity’ and improvisation went into creating the holiday homes on a limited budget. Bach building required strength as well as inventiveness and the men turned their hands to all kinds of labour.

On holiday my mother spent most of the time cooking and my father would be improving the bach. Knocking rocks off, carrying sand up and putting a bit of a playing area around the back, and of course a bit of fishing. Talking to the neighbours - you know, time goes very pleasantly.

They had to build on the solid rock. He used it as the foundation and where there wasn’t any he piled up the stones. No concrete. Just built on natural rock.

Attempts were made to modify the landscape by creating outdoor living areas and moving large rocks to make swimming pools.

When they started to improve the place - knocking off projecting rocks and things. Pelhams made a good deep pool. There was a rock outside Ellis’ place which was quite high and pointed and some bright spark thought they would knock it off. The water used to swirl around the rock and gouge out a pool on either side.

Old Harry Langley tried to build a beach down there in front of his bach. Yes, he worked very hard. He flattened all those rocks off and used to row around to the beach and fill his dinghy up with sand. But of course as he got older and he got tired, he got fed up with watching the water washing the sand off. It was quite good for a while. People would come down there and swim.

**Communal life**

**Communal work**

Men helped each other with the heavy construction tasks, especially those with crafts skills. People spoke proudly of the co-operative spirit.
The paths were built with brute strength and ignorance - they had to make their own paths. It was so rocky all the way through. For the first week of the holidays we would get pipi shells to put on the track and the stench was terrible. The idea was to have a white track to see in the dark. We put shells on the walking path. Started off with mud in front of Holdsworth and wheelbarrow it up. The mud filled the crevices so that the sand did not run through, and then put the sand on the mud and with the walking it got quite hard.

Coney’s bach came down in sections. It was an old place they brought down. We put it up and then we put the roof on and it wouldn’t fit. Well Andy Craig, he was the farmer ... was going past and said, ‘What’s the matter’, ‘Oh we can’t get the roof to fit’. He was a big man - he could hardly get in a door and he started to dance on the roof and eventually he and a few others managed to shake it into place. And as he was doing it he said, ‘By jingo I wish I had brought my bagpipes’.

My father was an outgoing friendly man. Never said a nasty word against anybody - saw good where there wasn’t any sometimes. He had been a boating man all his life and he was very useful at mending things. If there was anybody wanted something fixed he would help them.

Co-operation

Co-operation ran through all areas of daily life in the community.

People helped each other building the baches. They also used to help you round with stuff off the boat. Dad was into wheelbarrows and washtubs and ladders. Everyone used our wheelbarrow from the factory.

If we weren’t there when the stores arrived by boat it was put on Mrs Clark’s verandah. We would take our neighbour’s stores if we were passing.

There was always an abundance of fresh fish, and fishermen often had a surplus which was shared with other baches. Those who shot rabbits did the same.

We didn’t have a smokehouse. We hawked the fish around the Bay and usually got rid of it.

Recreational activities

Families, or at least the women and children, would go on picnics together. An annual picnic to Bird Island was one of the highlights.

When we were really young Mum would stay down with us and Dad would come back to work. She used to take us round the back beaches and any other kids who wanted to go.

The whole Bay would go round to Bird Rock. There was a little sandy bay. And I remember one year we went and the tide was in a bit and we couldn’t get out. So it was decided that all the kids would go for a swim but we did not have bathing suits or anything. So the girls got undressed down that end and the boys the other. They were carefree days. Unsophisticated carefree days.

We usually went around the back of Motutapu and sometimes the able-bodied would walk and the men would row the dinghies round to take all the gear down.

Hospitality

During the Christmas holidays every bach was full to overflowing. The families considered themselves fortunate to have a holiday home and extended hospitality to friends and relatives.

Besides our family there was my father’s sister who was married and had three children. So there were six of us kids, my parents, my uncle and aunt and my grandparents. Ten or eleven people - the bach was set up to accommodate all those people. Next door was my grandmothers’ sister and their children.

We had one big room, then the verandah where the bunks were for the boys, and the girl’s room. There were often a dozen people in our bach.

We used to take our friends down and there were quite a few boys around. Used to be in the gang together.

Miss Bowen and Miss Jackson, they were friends of my mother, and they would go down with the Ellises and us and the Langleys. They were all family friends. They were spinster ladies and they eventually built a place of their own down there.

A safe family place

With the statutory holidays over men returned to work in Auckland while the women and children stayed to enjoy the rest of the summer holiday. Later, when Snorkie Inglis introduced the 6.30 a.m. ‘workers’ boat men were able to rejoin their families each night. It was considered a safe and caring community for families. If adults were not around older children supervised younger ones swimming or playing.

I often think that we were brought up in a much better time. We all had dinghies there and we used to go out fishing. And what we did not realise. My mother and father had a dinghy and my brother and I had a dinghy and every weekend we would not be any further away from them than those pine trees. And we never got into any trouble.

There was always water in Horner’s pool. We would go there for half to low tide with the small ones. It was safe for them, but it was deep and swift and unsafe at high tide.

It was also an accepting community for single people. Miss Bowen and Miss Jackson who worked together were
well liked members of the community. Miss Bowen always wore men's clothes and was a strong contender in the New Year's dinghy race. Miss Masefield who kept a lodging house in Auckland often brought her paying guests to her bach.

Maudy Bowen she lived to a great old age and lived down there by herself for a long time. The other girl, Ethel Jackson, she was more little and feminine. Well, I suppose today they would look sideways at them but in those days nobody worried about them.

Young people were allowed to be there without their parents.

We used to go down there in the holidays three or four of us boys - our friends and cousins.

When I got older about 12 or 13 in the school holidays we would go down and stay there on our own. The parents would come down for the weekend. We were not on our own, mind you, there were all the others the Knox and Horner boys. We were young delinquents. We all had rifles and go rabbit shooting. It was a great place to go when you were in your teens.

Friendships.

Friendships formed at Islington Bay lasted for many years. Apart from Bach-holders Association meetings and fund raising events the members of the community did not socialise in Auckland, but as soon as they met again at the Bay relationships were renewed.

As soon as my grandmother got off the ferry Mrs Clark would talk to her, and then go on and the next ones would want to talk. It would take 20 mins to get to the bach. My grandmother loved it.

When my baby was born my husband wanted to keep in touch with them all down there. So we just piled the baby into the pram and went down on the boat. Just walked around to the bach. It was really lovely down there. The girls were my girlfriends: we all got on together.

Trade and business connections made at the Bay were called on in town. Knox worked at Farmers and arranged a discount when buying the children's Christmas gifts and prizes for the New Year's competitions. Jock Locke worked for the Harbour Board and was of assistance when the community built the first wharf. Harry Langley and George Dowling were builders and were employed to construct many of the later baches. Mr Horner had a ships' provedores and William Ellis, a boatbuilder, were often called upon by their Islington Bay friends for their services.

Everyone knew what everyone did like Jock Locke in the Harbour Board. So if someone wanted some heavy timber they would go and see him and he would arrange something. If someone was building a bach and Grandpa had it (material required) they would come to him. They worked in with each other.

Fondness

People recall their holidays and friends at Islington Bay with fondness and nostalgia. For them all it represents a magical part of their childhood and young adulthood.

I had a lovely time there. I was 15 when I went down there and 21 when I got married and all the people came to the wedding.

It was the happiest time of my life - my brothers' as well.

We never tired of going down there. Could not imagine going anywhere else. So many people, it was a real community then. There is no place comparable to it. All that beautiful foliage growing apparently out of rock. And the quietness there was marvellous till everybody had to get generators.

Special occasions

Sundays

In the late 1920s and early 1930s a visiting pastor, Jasper Calder of the City Mission, came every second week or so to hold a service at Islington Bay. He was very popular in the yachting fraternity and had been given a launch, 'Crusader', bought with funds raised by various yacht clubs. The services were held on the beach at Motutapu and were well attended especially for christenings. He was castigated by his superiors for holding services outdoors as it was thought to be creating a carnival type atmosphere. Later when the hall was built, Mrs Pelham played the piano for services held there.

While the majority of the bach-holders were Protestants there was a minority of Catholic families who occasionally invited Father Furlong from Devonport to conduct a service in one of their baches.

When we first came to the Bay there was no church (services). Then Jasper Calder used to come and have a service on the beach by the bridge on the flat by Motutapu. Then the naval chaplain came once a month in summer. Those services were held in the hall. Of course the Catholics had a service in one of their baches.

We would go to church services in the hall on Sundays. Grandma Pelham would play the hymns. I was very interested in the church services and my boyfriend.
New Year's brass band: Hickey

Dinghy race starting out from the bay: Hickey

The bonfire ready for New Year's Eve: Ellis

Story book and nature themes in children's fancy-dress: Ellis

Decorated boat competition: Ellis
Christmas

Christmas was a private time for the families except when Santa Claus arrived with a small gift for each child. Some of the women would get together in Auckland and buy the gifts from Farmers. Santa, of course, was one of the men.

We collected 5/- from each bach for presents for the children and the surplus was for prizes for the regatta. I’ve still got a 3d screwdriver I got as a prize.

The traditional Christmas dinner was cooked in the camp oven - leg of lamb and roast vegetables - followed by Christmas pudding, and cake. The children are amazed at how their mothers aunts and grandmothers managed. Later there would be carol singing in the baches.

Christmas day was usually pretty quiet. Used to have quite a good meal but not much activity with the people. Don’t remember any church service. Mother would cook something special.

New Year’s celebrations

New Year’s celebrations were the highlight of the holidays. Preparations and plans started in Auckland and when the families arrived at the Bay a few days before Christmas anticipation and excitement grew. It was the one time of year that everyone was there together so the whole community became involved. Bay traditions developed around these festivities which were focused on unsophisticated family fun.

They used to go around and get donations from all the baches. Money donations preferably or material donations and then they would go and buy mostly from the Farmers because Knox used to give them a discount. And they had a fairly comprehensive swimming, boating programme organised. All the families were involved.

A day or two before New Year’s Eve the large punt was towed out by numerous dinghies to collect firewood from around the shore. It was constructed into a huge bonfire on the flat by Motutapu. Towards evening everyone assembled on the beach to watch the fire. Mavis Rae remembers one year when Harry Langleley and Mrs Pelham appeared from behind the bonfire as Dante and his wife rising from the inferno. At midnight they began first footing.

We used to go around and load the punt up with driftwood and build the bonfire for New Year’s Eve. It was a very nice sort of evening. Sometimes the yachtsies would join in.

I think some of the boys used to drink beer, and some tried to roast spuds in the ashes. We sang and pranced around and had a lot of fun.

On New Year’s Eve you would go round from one bach to another. Mr Monro would pipe in the New Year. The next bach to us was Dogherty and he was as Scotch as you make them - she liked a dark person to cross the threshold first, and she would drag me into it.

At New Year’s we would go first footing. In the evening we had a bonfire on the beach. The bonfire went till midnight and then we would go to each bach first footing. Daylight met us at the last bach. Then it was home to have breakfast and the day’s festivities.

New Year’s Day

On New Year’s Day there was the annual dinghy races for men and women. Dinghies were towed out to the compass dolphin at the entrance of the bay and raced in towards the wharf. Competition was fierce and the rivalry between baches intense. Some baches had dinghies purpose built for this race by Mr Ellis.

I won the dinghy race three years in succession. I used to train for the race. I would row around Motutapu, 10 miles, in 3+ hours. My father, he was middle aged then, he could row around in 3+ hours.

This was where my Dad came in because he was a boat builder and built quite a lot of those dinghies. Ellis dinghies always seemed to be pretty good. He built one for Maudy Bowen and the Simmons had one.

I won the Farmers cup a couple of times. It was for everything, an overall cup. You got points and they added them together. Noel Simmons had a boat that was 14ft long, a proper rowing dinghy, and of course he used to wallop us. I got 2nd a couple of times.

We used to go into the boat races. My father used to handicap them and just about did us out of the races in case he was considered to be a bit partial to his own family.

Depending on the tide the running races were held in the morning or afternoon on the flat at Motutapu. This was followed by decorated dinghy and sandcastle competitions. The highlight was the fancy-dress parade for old and young at the end of the day. Fancy-dress costumes had to be made from items found on the island or around the bach. Favourite costumes reflected Rangitoto themes and storybook characters.

And in the early stages the fancy-dress was supposed to be made from things obtained on the island. I remember going as robin redbreast and I had to go round and pick all the red leaves (pohutukawa) and my aunt sewed them all on. That was fun, we enjoyed that.

The day ended with a gathering outside the Monro’s bach where a flat area was decorated with lanterns. The prizes for the day’s competitions were awarded, followed by a singsong and general festivities. These were accompanied by a special band which was put together for the occasion.
New Year’s Day prize-giving was held round at Monro’s. They put Chinese lanterns and things out in the backyard and we had the prize-giving for the sports. There was a band of different instruments for the New Year’s Party. Even the adults dressed up for New Years.

**Alcohol**

Most respondents noted the absence of alcohol on these occasions and emphasised the family atmosphere in the community.

But one thing that stuck me about it was mere was no booze, no swearing and, well, even when they told yarns they were drawing-room yams. There was no booze, partly because all the bach-holders had families. It wasn’t a prim and proper place but it wasn’t a boisterous one. There was no drunken revelry until the hall was put up.

**Organisation and improvements**

**Bach-holders organisation**

Since the inception of the community the bach-holders, as an informal group, had organised co-operative projects such as buying the punt, path making and the New Year’s festivities. They were effective in approaching authorities for assistance with larger projects such as the wharf. This loose organisation relied on the goodwill and communal spirit of the leaseholders who utilised their skills and business connections for the benefit of the community. Leadership fell to those who felt able.

George Dennis was the manager of a clothing factory out in Greys Ave. He was the organiser of most of us in the early days. Of all the things that happened Dennis would organise a meeting. Like getting the paths made. All the males from twelve onwards helped putting through the path from the baches to the wharf.

It was not until 1933 when the population had grown considerably and new amenities were being proposed, that the bach-holders officially registered as the Islington Bay Shackholders Association.

**The Islington Bay wharf**

In the early 1920s the bach-holders contracted Snorkie Inglis to take them, their supplies and building materials to the Bay in his launch Olive Rose. They guaranteed him 30/- per trip. As there was no jetty it was necessary to tranship people and goods into a dinghy to get ashore. Next they bought a large punt which was moored to a sunken boiler in the Bay to await their arrival. People and goods were offloaded onto the punt and rowed ashore. On Sunday evenings everyone boarded the punt again and waited at the boiler for the launch to arrive.

In 1925 the group decided to build a jetty and approached the Devonport Domain Board for financial assistance. Jock Locke, a bach-holder and employee of the Harbour Board, obtained old piles and the use of the Harbour Board pile driver. George Dennis supplied second-hand materials for the wharf decking. The bach-holders themselves did the work.

The minutes of the Devonport Domain Board of 1 July 1925 record that the Auckland Harbour Board had approved plans for launch landing at Islington Bay. At the Domain Board meeting of 2.12.1925, £20 was granted towards the cost of the wharf, and an invitation was received to the official opening of the wharf on Saturday 5 December. The bach-holders, determined to have the wharf with or without financial assistance, had already built it when the grant was made.

The residents approached the Devonport Domain Board. We built the original wharf. The residents had to half-pie pay for that and supply the labour. We kids didn’t do any work, we got out of it. Dad did because he was a carpenter. It was 1925, I was only about 12 then.

Jock Locke was a Scot with a broad accent, and was in charge of Harbour Board Wharf Maintenance. He was our expert during the building of our wharf and saved us very considerable expense. The wharf steps came from the Devonport wharf; the piles were condemned piles from the Auckland wharves and were driven in when the pile-driver was renewing piles at the quarries. George Dennis, Manager of Ross and Glendinnings Clothing Factory, obtained sufficient second-hand tramrails for strings to take the decking of the wharf.

**Development**

**The road**

The prisoner built road connecting Rangitoto Wharf to Islington Bay reached the Bay in 1933. With it came a number of changes not only to the amenities but also the character of the community. The settlement now had more comfortable facilities - the wharf and road access - and bach sites were opened up along the road. These attracted wealthier holiday-makers who could afford a professionally built holiday home.

The newcomers caused a stir.

It was a nine day wonder when came because all this new timber arrived and everyone else had been bringing down packing cases. Everybody was agog to see who these people were going to be, they thought they must have been millionaires.

The opening of the road provided easier access for the caretaker, Reg Noble, who lived at Rangitoto Wharf where he ran the shop and kiosk. He could now perform his caretaking duties more diligently and also provide for the daily needs of the holiday makers. He bought a vehicle and came daily from Rangitoto Wharf with groceries.
The hall and tennis courts
On June 8 1934 a meeting of bach-holders was called at Mr E. Taylor’s home, Sheehan St., Ponsonby, to discuss details of proposed plan for a Pavilion and Clubhouse near the tennis courts. At this meeting it was decided to build a Tennis Club Pavilion (McGehan undated:1).

The proposed hall and tennis courts aroused debate concerning whether such amenities should be available in a holiday community. Many thought that organised recreation was not appropriate at Islington Bay. However, the Association decided it would be an asset to the growing community and raised funds through debentures from the bach-holders. This money was sufficient to buy all the materials apart from the stone used for the walls and employ three carpenters to carry out the work. The prisoners prepared the site and erected the stone walls. The hall was opened at Christmas 1934.

The committee worked out it would be good to have a hall. It was because the prisoners were there, it was something for them to do. So they had the opportunity for the prisoners to build the hall and tennis courts. They took money from people to build the hall.

Some of the Bach-holders Association thought the hall was a good idea. I think they also were looking for work for the prisoners to do when they built the tennis courts, and the hall was originally built as a pavilion.

The Shackholders raised the money. The prisoners put the stone foundation down and Mr Clark did the building part. The floor was supplied by the Shackholders.

On completion of the hall the prison labour levelled off an area in front of it sufficient for three tennis courts. The cost of surfacing tarsealing, netting wire and posts was met by the Association (McGeehan undated:2).

We just decided we wanted some tennis courts - something for the young ones to do. A chap named Pierce made it - that was his trade. The prisoners did all the foundation work for it. The money came through the Association to pay Pierce. I think the Devonport Domain Board chipped in for the hall but I’m sure we did the tennis courts - the residents.

Playground

Beside the tennis courts and hall a children’s playground was put in.

Herdman presented the slides and the swings for the children’s playground. He was some sort of businessman in Auckland. They were newcomers - the inland ones.

St Johns Ambulance

The St Johns Ambulance hut was entirely an Association project. They raised the money and built the hut. It was opened with a ceremony in 1935.

The St Johns Ambulance used to come down for the day. Then they would come and stay in a bach. Then the bach-holders built them a hut. They always manned it during the summer weekends and the school holiday time. They weren’t called on a great deal. Without being derogatory to the men themselves, most of the older women were from pioneer families and they were used to cuts and bruises and most of them could deal with it.

Mr McGeehan was President of the Shackholders Association. He was instrumental in getting the St Johns Ambulance. He and my grandmother did a lot of the ambulance work there. He was the one people went to with fishhooks in their hands. He’d push it right through till he could get the barb out and cut it off.

New recreational activities

By the time the hall and the tennis courts were built (1934) those who had first come as children in the 1920s, were young adults and ready to enjoy the activities the new amenities provided.

There were enough people down there to have a tennis tournament each year. Three Knox boys, Merv Taylor and a girl Dowling. The Clarks they had a couple too.

It was a thriving community before the war. There was the tennis club, the hall, bowls in the hall, dances. We were too young for the dances. But I can remember all the girls out there in their frilly lilies playing tennis and all the rest of it.

The dances

You used to take your lamps along so there was plenty of lighting. You knew it was on so everyone turned up with their pressure lamps and sandshoes for dancing. They were great nights and everybody went, the whole family, the children in arms and the toddlers. The younger ones teeny bopped in the corners. It had a good floor for dancing. A little room out the back where Mr Noble would serve fizzy drinks. We had the piano out of the Olive Rose to begin with and later on a better piano. Mrs Pelham used to play all the old fashioned dances: valeta, maxina, waltzes, and someone else would take over and play a foxtrot or quickstep. Every Saturday night and on special
occasions like Easter. And New Year’s Eve of course there was always a dance - that took over from the old prize-giving that we used to have in Monro’s backyard.

Mrs Pelham used to play the piano at the hall. Old George Dowling used to keep things in order. If there were yachties up there and things got out of hand he would whip off home and come back with a policeman’s hat. Sort them out. He was a great big fellow.

I was old enough for the dances. I played my accordion for the dances. They used to have a lot of fun down there. They had good tennis courts too.

For the first time the problem of alcohol in a public place became an issue.

There was no drink allowed in the hall. If any of the yachties came in a little under the weather they were always turned round and sent away. They were well controlled dances, we never had any trouble at all.

There was no drinking of course in the hall. The men could go outside and have a drink if they wanted to. The older people objected to the drink too.

**Romance**

Although the hall and tennis courts cannot alone be credited with providing romance, the dances and tennis tournaments no doubt enhanced the opportunities for it. The new activities were an incentive for young people to continue to come to the Bay for holidays and weekends instead of staying in Auckland as they perhaps may have as they got older.

Some of the dances you changed partners. Like in the valeta - mixing it up. You always knew who was trying to walk out with whom - little jealousies would show up. Always little romances in the Bay. That’s how Trotters Track was renamed Lovers Lane. Many a couple used to go that way home. They didn’t go bush or anything. Just stop on the track and cuddle and kiss. And of course you could hear people coming because it is a bit hollow underneath.

That’s how we met my husband and I. He came down to stay with his good friend and we met at the dances.

It was a marvellous place for wooing. Shangri la. At night time the stars always seemed bigger because you weren’t getting any haze. There was an outdoor seat around by the gap that faced towards Tiri. You could sit and watch the breakers on the shore.

**Contentious issues**

As the community grew from the small integrated group of friends and relatives, areas of tension and resentment arose.
Some of the newcomers were more affluent and had ideas for the development of the settlement which many felt were out of place. Tension arose between the older generation, some of whom were living semi-permanently there, and the young people. Factions formed along denominational lines when a competing boat service took up the run.9

**Denominational factionalism**

The Sunday services held on the beach and later in the hall, were open to all, but the Catholic families did not attend. They occasionally invited a priest to hold a service in one of their baches. Non-Catholics were not invited. Of course the Catholics had a service. They had their private hall was always open and anyone at all was welcome to go to those services although it was usually taken by an Anglican minister.

And that religion was a nuisance. Sometimes there would be arguments between the Catholics and the Protestants and they would not be talking for a while and then they would pick up again and talk. The Catholics had a priest come over, they would use the hall then. Give them the time up there. It was a bit difficult at times. There were quite a lot of Catholic families.

Initially relationships between the Catholics and others were harmonious.

In the early days religion never came into it. There were the S... who were Catholics they were early ones. Actually part of the money for the hall was raised by those dos held in the Catholic hall in Ponsonby. We used to raise money by having evenings up in town where everybody was expected to go. This raised quite a bit of money for the public things. There was no feeling about Catholics and Protestants in those days. It was afterwards when there was money involved that there became a bit of feeling.

But when more people came into the community, some of whom were wealthy Catholics, groups holding differing opinions on how the community should function were formed on denominational lines.

The Cs... were Catholics and they were fairly vocal and they also had some money. They were the leading lights on the Catholic side. The Catholics went one way and some went the other. It got into the boat business. Some took sides and you could almost tell what their religious backgrounds were. The H... they were quite vocal too. The Catholics would have meetings in H...’s bach about what they were going to do. I know there was some scullduggery. The adults would talk about it.

**The boat business**

When the wharf was built Norman (Snorkie) Inglis began a regular fare paying launch service in the Olive Rose to replace the contract service. He became part of the community and built himself a bach for the boatmen and their families. During the summer he ran a workers’ boat which left at 6.30 a.m. and returned each evening. In this way families could spend the whole summer holiday at the Bay even when men had to return to work. There are many stories of his seamanship, his helpfulness and resourcefulness in getting building materials onto impossible rocky outcrops close to bach sites. It was extremely difficult to manhandle timber from the wharf along the narrow, self made, paths. Snorkie Inglis was admired and appreciated.

The success of the Inglis launch service encouraged competition. A new launch service was started. Those who patronised it were the ‘newcomers’. This deepened the rift between the established community and the later arrivals. Trevor Horner tells the story in his memoirs.

By 1930 the service had grown so much that other launch proprietors became envious. Snorkie Inglis was a short, nuggety, sandy haired, fiery tempered, man who had made many friends and as many enemies. Newcomers to the Bay knew nothing of his excellent service, and cared less. Becoming disgruntled, they chartered another boat, ‘Romance’ owned by Cocky Compton, a much younger man with the same build, and fiery temper as Inglis. The original bach-holders were loyal to Inglis and as they travelled every weekend he still had a profitable service. The trip to the Bay became a race; at times an exciting one. Inglis who had been on the harbour all his life, worked the tides and eddies to his advantage. Compton, finding the service unprofitable, withdrew to the delight of the ‘originals’ and dismay of the newcomers, who had to creep back to the Olive launches.

Competition to Inglis’ service came and went. Bob Price, a newcomer, started a service but the old guard stayed faithful to Inglis. A Catholic group wanted the Shackholders Association to build their own launch. Some of the other stories are expressed here.

Previous to this, for a short time someone else came in which caused a bit of trouble. Snorkie (Inglis) gave service in an unknown market. It wasn’t known if there would be several people or six. Then several people got boats of their own and then they would take people and that became a problem. That went against the service.

This boat business split the Bay. The crowd that went down with Inglis at 1.30 p.m. on Saturday then Prices brought one in earlier. There was opposition to Inglis. Bob Price commenced a launch service for his three sons to operate. Bob Price was a bach-holder as was his brother Les. Some went on the early boat. We waited for Inglis - in the end he won out. Then everyone took sides. Up until then everyone had been friendly. I remember my aunt and uncle saying that it had split the bay and it was not as friendly as it had been previously.
A supporter of the Price service describes the events. Then the boat service to a certain degree caused a bit of a rift because some wanted to put in money to buy another boat. When the Prices had the service - they were living down there. It was a good service as they had to go up and down themselves. So that the people were able to stay there much better than previously. Up until then there had only been weekend service. Except in the summer. It was much more convenient to have someone living on the island with the boat service. Others thought that if they had their own boat they could be the admiral of the fleet.

Others say:

The boat Prices lived up by Stewarts and they had a large area up there with big tanks. How that ever came to be I do not know but these little mysteries popped up from time to time. They ran the boats up and down - wouldn’t say service. We never had a service with them. Never knew when they would run or not. If it didn’t suit them to come back they didn’t come. It wasn’t very satisfactory.

Somebody could have written a book about the boats going down. Snorkie Inglis and Prices had a big war with each other, they ran in competition at one stage. He managed to freeze them out and then I can’t remember if Prices bought him out or not.

The hall

As already mentioned the hall was the cause of dissension from its inception. Those who were against it felt that organised activities would undermine the intimacy of the community by supplanting informal socialising. The formation of a committee and institution of rules for the use of the hall were predicted to be a source of conflict. Furthermore, some people felt that the activities provided by the hall and tennis courts were inappropriate in a place with the boat service. Others thought that if they had their own boat they could be the admiral of the fleet.

My father forecast the split in the Bay. He said it was the worst mistake they ever made to build a hall down there. He said when they started they would start committees and because it was such a small outfit there would be jealousies of one getting into a position and another one being left out. He said that when this happens the Bay is going to change, which it did. We were there ten years before the hall was built.

The adults argued. They would argue about anything and everything. Mainly about getting an Association going. Things like running the hall and this sort of thing.

Some people were against the hall - these modern things. They said, ‘You can get that all back in Auckland - the hall and tennis courts, we come here to get away from it’.

Personality differences came to the fore amongst the ‘originals’.

Mrs Pelham and Langley were on committees and they both used to draw swords at one another practically every time. They seemed to be on opposing lines of thought. She was a person that wasn’t afraid to say what she thought. It was always with the good of the community in mind. She always got up and said what she felt. So she and he had a few blustering times. But then it wasn’t difficult to fall out with Harry Langley because he had been in the war and I think he had been a sergeant. This little bit of power, unfortunately is one of the drawbacks of a small community. People who have no other opportunity to be a big fish in a big pool, they suddenly find they can be a very small tadpole in a very small puddle and make the most of their advantage. This was one of the things that gradually crept in. Some of them felt they were part of the senate.

Generational differences

A decade or more since the beginning of the community the children of the original families were young adults and some of the older generation had semi-retired to the island. The older people felt a proprietary right to the settlement they had established; the young people wished to enjoy the facilities. The tension between the generations arose mainly over the use of the hall.

From the time the hall was built there was a split amongst the generations. The younger generation was coming on. There was quite a lot of them and they would bring down their friends and they were all in on the dances.

Some of the older people down there didn’t like the young people dancing and throwing themselves about and of course I was very fond of dancing. They think they can stop the dance. They would ask what time is it going to on till and Grandma would say, ‘I will play here until the young people are finished’. We are all here to enjoy ourselves tonight. So you go home Mr Langley if you don’t like dancing.

One year New Year’s Eve fell on Sunday. The young ones wanted to have a dance. We weren’t allowed to use the hall. We went to Langley first and he refused the keys. So we all got together and went to Mrs Emily Pelham and she said she would let us in at 12 midnight because it was no longer Sunday.

Then that became a bit of a rift in the place because one side of the community wanted to bowl and the other wanted to dance and they couldn’t both do it at the same time on the same floor. Each one thought they had prior rights. Sometimes the person who had the key wouldn’t give it to one because they knew the others wanted to play bowls. It was probably generational as the elderly wanted the bowls, the young to dance.

Mrs P. was between 40 and 50 with a lot of spirit. She ran the Bay really. Some people will tell you she just got the Bay up and going. The elderly people did not want it. They
wanted quietness but they could not do much about it. The young people wanted to go and play on the sands, play basketball, go swimming, ya hoo out to each other. Mrs Pelham said, 'I can’t see why they can’t do that'. She was in charge of us young ones.

The social impact

Although the hall is viewed by the residents as the catalyst of conflict and change, my research suggests that other factors contributed to the changing character of the community. The expansion of the settlement both physically and numerically meant that the tight knit community could no longer function as a cohesive whole. Groups formed, some on denominational grounds, others associated with affluence and length of tenure. The ‘originals’ resented the wealthier newcomers with their ‘town’ ideas. The ‘original’ children were by this time young adults, breaking away from family group activities and bringing down friends for entertainment. The pioneering work having been done, the ‘original’ adults were ready to enjoy the fruits of their labours and were somewhat resentful of what they saw as a take over.

Geographical distance

By the mid 1930s the community had grown to nearly 40 baches and more than 200 people. The settlement which had started at the channel facing Motutapu was now strung out past the wharf westwards and inland along the road. From a small intimate colony the settlement had become too large for everyone to know each other well. People’s area of interest was confined to those who lived closest to the activities of their daily lives.

Our main interest started at the wharf and went round to the bridge. From the wharf to Jock Lockes and Cruikshanks were not quite our territory as kids. We were more interested in the families in the more immediate area.

At Isi Bay there was a sort of division at the wharf. It was because of the walking traffic - you had to pass the other baches to get to our bach. When I came I only knew those people.

Class and cliques

Several of the wealthy were pushing for the hall. The magistrate - on the road near the hall, and Johnstons of Blue Motors were also pushy. Mrs Johnston and Dowling were always together. They were high faluting of course.

It was lovely in the early days. But I didn’t care for it so much later. It became a bit more cliquey so that some people talked to this one so you weren’t very popular if you talked to them. It was beginning to change when the hall was built. Up until then we used to be a nice little family where everyone’s door was open and you could go in and out of people’s places.

Then they got some people down, people with money. Because Horner’s and us we never had any money. There was Johnston of Blue Motors you know. They gave a cup for the lady’s dinghy race. They were way out of our class as far as money was concerned. There was a bit of that.

I suppose I should not say this but the happiest time down there was when there were only a few of us. When people with more money came down it wasn’t so good.

Formal socialising

Then instead of people coming to other people’s houses they used to go up and play bowls or have a dance. It then became that people didn’t have to do their own thing. Whereas up until then people had gone to each others’ houses at night and have a bit of a singsong or a bit of a party.

We used to go round during the year and have parties at Monro’s. Not inside the house but on the flat they had. But once there was the hall people went up there and it didn’t have the same family atmosphere and the boats used to come. So it changed to a public sort of thing.

It was never the same after we went into the hall. No one was allowed into the hall in shorts that was female or male. Yachtsies used to come in and if they didn’t have slacks on they were not allowed into the hall.

Changing traditions

With the newcomers and the hall came new ways of doing things. The transformation of traditional Bay festivities from informal, inexpensive fun, focused on the Bay environment, to a more expensive and sophisticated occasion, was resented. People felt that the Isi Bay spirit was lacking when the ready-made fancy-dress from Auckland replaced the Bay-made ones and the inexpensive prizes from Farmers were supplanted by silver cups. Having the prize-giving in the hall instead of outside Monro’s bach introduced a formality which spoilt the simplicity cherished by the Bay ‘originals’.

I didn’t feel that going into a hall was part of the Bay when you had the open air. We didn’t go to the bowls or dances. They would have the prize-giving up there and we would go to that.

We used to have on New Year’s Day our celebrations and dress parade. In the 1920s the dress parade was anything
you could find around the bach and later on they brought hired costumes from Auckland. It was a bit of a flop we thought.

The changing community climate

The 'originals' built their baches when their resources were minimal and they depended on each other for assistance. With little official aid they had worked co-operatively to build the wharf and paths. The climate of communal effort changed with wealthier newcomers employing professional builders and the Shackholders Association's contribution to the hall and tennis courts being purely financial.

Later baches built by builders were the ones near the wharf and the inland ones. One was a retired magistrate. Co-operation died when richer people came in - well the spirit changed.

I think the early people relied on each other more - they built their own places. We had someone come and put up the framing and we did the rest of it. So there was that 'You help me and I'll help you, which afterwards there didn't have to be to the same degree as builders built the baches or they were already there.

When we built no-one was affluent. After the Depression more moneysed people came and built beautiful baches - built by a builder - all those up on the road. Things changed then. Before that we were all poor and had fun on nothing. They owned launches, speed boats, etc.

Conclusion

The people of the remote settlement at Islington Bay enjoyed a decade of simple outdoor holidays marked by a strong community spirit. Their informal organisation was effective in improving facilities and organising social events. The gradual assimilation of newcomers into a group related by family and friendships brought little change. Their festivities celebrated their environment and became a traditional part of their unique circumstances.

But my informants feel that the influx of wealth and the building of facilities greatly changed the community in the immediate pre-war years. Their isolation ended, the pioneering co-operative community spirit of the early years was replaced by formal organisation which caused disaffection. Many factors are attributable to the change: growing population, exposure to authority; people growing older; and classism. The community which re-grouped after World War II was of a very different character from that of the 1920s.
CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

Introduction

In studying a community, one is faced with a great variety of problems. The question is whether they are all equally central for the understanding of what gives to a grouping of people this specific character - the character of a community (Elias and Scotson 1965:27).

My first problem was finding comparable community studies on which to base an analysis of what made these communities unique or even what made them function. My search produced nothing on holiday communities. Burch (1969:82) speaks of 'single purpose villages' meaning towns constructed for a large industry or infrastructural projects but, as the Rangitoto communities lacked any remunerative purpose, it did not apply. Turning to material on New Zealand pioneering communities I found a controversy over the nature of colonial society which was of interest.

Early community in New Zealand

We have traditionally believed that our pioneering forefathers lived in clusters of close knit, isolated communities which exhibited a high degree of social cohesion and interdependence. The traditional viewpoint expressed by Gardner (1957), Oliver (1972) and Olssen (1981) portrays New Zealand society in the first forty years of colonisation as being concentrated in small communities employed in taming the land and establishing well ordered societies. The new opportunity to own land, improve status and be 'one's own boss' gave rise to a sense of co-operation and the community working together for mutual benefit. In such an isolated society people were self-reliant and responsible to and for each other. Order was kept by the interdependency of the households both economically and effectively. Intense social bonding was an integral feature of these communities.

This isolation and self sufficiency began to break down with the improvement of communications. With rail and road transport rural communities looked to the larger centres for marketing increased agricultural production. At the same time the government's need for regulation and uniformity brought small communities into its orbit of power diminishing the necessity for interdependence within communities.

Miles Fairburn's book (1989), *The Ideal Society and its Enemies* completely reverses this concept. He maintains that nineteenth century New Zealand had a frontier society marked by isolation, transiency and a lack of social bonding. He dismisses the 'insulated local communities' theory as being an idealised and Arcadian concept stemming from the 'good old days' syndrome of nostalgic romanticism. It was an 'atomized society' without community spirit or loyalty. Community requires social bonding which Fairburn argues was lacking in early rural New Zealand society: Kinship ties were minimal as people immigrated as singles or with only direct family members; vertical bonding or patronage did not exist in the egalitarian society and horizontal or peer bonding was minimal due to the transient nature of the society and the constantly moving frontier.

By the 1920s, Fairburn argues, the frontier had ceased to move. Improved communication, economics and uniform controls had brought the country sufficient stability to allow communities to develop and consolidate. Furthermore, over the elapsed seventy years kinship groups had enlarged down the generational tiers. The traditional concept is that these factors led to a break down of community as people looked outward and took advantage of employment opportunities in new industries to widen their sphere of interest.

Fairburn's grim picture of a rough, transient and egalitarian society consolidated and stabilised by central government at the turn of the century is in contrast to the traditionally accepted image put forward by Olssen and Gardner of close knit, caring, responsible, self-sufficient communities progressively invaded by the long arm of the law and administered into conformity. While the debate about the nature of New Zealand colonial society pivots on timing of community development there is agreement on the basic elements that constitute community: social bonding and interdependence.

As outlined in Chapter Three, movement to Auckland from rural areas had begun in the Depression of the late 1880s. The city had steadily grown as people were attracted to the developing manufacturing and export industries. The people who holidayed at Rangitoto lived for the rest of the year in widely dispersed suburbs and may have had different experiences of 'community' dependent on their individual social networks and circumstances. In Auckland they worked, went to church, to school, participated in sports and other clubs and may or may not have had extended family connections. Nevertheless, the transcripts show overwhelmingly that my informants had definite concepts of what community meant to them. They talked at length of caring, sharing, co-operation, communal work and communal socialising. They perceived most positively their communities on Rangitoto as having the qualities of the traditional New Zealand community.
It was like New Zealand used to be and it was carried on a bit later. Everyone cared and shared.

Although people perceive these communities as being 'as New Zealand used to be' the analogy lacks many elements which the traditional story holds as essential; there was no economic interdependency in the sense that their livelihoods depended on each other, no church, no school, no compelling reason to interact and, except in the case of dire emergency, no need to ask or give aid. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the traditional story which are common to the Rangitoto communities are: breaking in new 'land', isolation, opportunity to be 'one's own boss', kinship and family groups and lack of services. At the same time, it could be argued that it was the developments outlined in Fairburn's model that gave rise to such communities. After all it was economic progress that made leisure and holidays possible and transportation that made the island accessible.

### The communities - what made them

This discussion of what made the communities at Rangitoto does not involve the Beacon End. Although the majority of bach-holders knew each other in Devonport where they lived, the families and individuals were so seldom there at the same time that no community developed. Beyond the concept that people are involved in community there is no complete agreement as to the nature of Community (Hillery 1955:91).

The communities which formed on Rangitoto were geographically isolated from each other and the city by the sea. The lack of transport, even after the road was constructed, meant there was little interaction between the communities. They were also spatially limited by the nature of the terrain and the areas designated by the Domain Board. An Islington Bay resident remarked:

The people round by the lighthouse might as well have been at the south pole.

The salient factors differentiating these communities from others about which theories of community have been formulated are: they were intermittent and ongoing, there was no economic activity which could create interdependence, there were no formal social groupings and little official authority.

### Communitas

Rangitoto represented 'holiday'. People went there when they were not operating in their 'day-to-day' society. Everything was different at Rangitoto; their living conditions, their daily activities, the people around them. The dichotomy between work and leisure was emphasised by the change in surroundings, activities and companions.

So you stood on the wharf and looked for the fish, and you looked towards town and all you could see was smog.

If you went down on Saturday morning you got your stuff from the wharf around to the bach and then got the boat out and go fishing to get the first meal.

How then to explain the community ethic which formed in these settlements? Victor Turner (1982:205) talks about 'communitas' as a relationship formed amongst people in a situation outside their normal state. He quotes Znaniecki (1936: Chapter 3) defining communitas as "a bond uniting people over and above any formal social bonds." Although he is referring to states of transition such as initiation ceremonies where participants are temporarily stripped of their normal role in order to be invested with higher status, I think that this definition can be usefully applied to these communities. Turner talks of a group unity developing 'a kind of generic bond outside the constraints of social structure'(1982:205).

Pure communitas exists briefly where social structure is not. This is necessarily a transient condition because it does not fit into the orderly sequential operation of day-to-day society (1982:206).

The Rangitoto holiday communities were reconstituted each succeeding summer with the same people and the same activities which emphasised the separation of all year life from holiday time. Communitas developed in the periods spent outside the normal social structure both physical and temporal. It was founded on basic societal values of cooperation and communal sharing. In the city, in their normal work-a-day lives where they belonged to other communities, people interacted in 'the holiday community' only for fund raising and community business matters.

We didn't see people in Auckland. We would go down every summer and just pick up where we left off. The associations go back such a long time.

I don't think my grandparents were social with the other people in Auckland. They had another social community. When they were down there it was one big family.

### Collective values

The concept of 'community values' came through very strongly in the interviews. There was a sense that the community ethos was special and extraordinary and was engendered through the experience of being on Rangitoto. W.R. Burch (1969:83) defines an essential element of any community as the holding of 'collective values' and 'a common
fund of mutual expectations held by the community members in respect to one another'. Those attributes which I have termed basic societal values are qualities my informants spoke of as being significant. Throughout the descriptive chapters the words 'communal, sharing, caring, community feeling, co-operation, inclusion', recur time and again.

No-one ever kept them (fish) all themselves. They would wheel barrow them around. It was all incredibly communal. Everything that anyone had, and it didn’t matter what it was, when you ran out it was all share alike. Food, clothes, bedding, paint. Everyone was only too happy to help. It was a wonderfully close knit community.

Each family was very concerned with all the kids and everyone knew where everyone was and automatically cared for anyone in your vicinity. And if anyone was missing it would be noticed after a short time. It was well monitored the whole place. I think that was the nice thing about the communal feeling that they had - no problem with anybody. Everyone cared for everyone.

They were good times. Everyone used to help everyone else. Someone might be going to build a ramp for their boat. Well most of us would wander by and before you knew it there was a dozen of us picking up stones and helping.

Everything was freely available - except the boats. A lot of the people down there had virtually nothing. You never mistrusted anyone. Everything was taken at face value and what was mine was shared.

We would say we were having a barbecue round at the flat and everyone would arrive with everything. And if there were people who just came down for the day they would get roped in as well.

Organisation and community projects

Social unity within the settlements led to communal efforts to improve facilities through fundraising and co-operative labour. It was recognised that leadership was necessary to organise such efforts and to represent the communities’ interests in the wider society.

The Wharf community formed an organisation with elected representatives from the beginning, to arrange social activities and deal with the Rangitoto Domain Board. The Bay community had an informal arrangement with leadership by consensus and projects were carried out by communal labour. In 1933 when new facilities were proposed a formal organisation was established which superseded the informal leadership arrangements.

Fundraising events often took place in Auckland in order to draw on a larger public. The Islington Bay community raised funds for building materials for their wharf and hall and built the St Johns Ambulance hut; the Rangitoto Wharf community had concerts to fund the children’s play equipment. We put on concerts and we raised money to put in the children’s play area through these concerts. Everyone had to do a turn. Actually there were some very, very clever people on the island - very talented (Rangi Wharf).

We used to raise money by having evenings up in town where everybody was expected to go. This raised quite a bit of money for the public things (Isi Bay).

Celebrations

People in all cultures recognize the need to set aside certain times and spaces for celebratory use, in which the possibility of personal and communal creativity may arise (Turner 1982:12).

The Rangitoto communities celebrated the traditional festivities common in the wider community - Christmas, New Year’s, birthdays - but made it an opportunity for personal and communal creativity. They developed elements which were incorporated into their celebrations making them uniquely Bay or Wharf traditions; for example the fancy-dress had to be made from things on the island. In this way the communities celebrated their distinctiveness from wider society and inclusion of its members.

The old Scottish tradition of celebrating Hogmanay with a bonfire on New Year’s Eve, (James:1961:296) was adapted to the Rangitoto environment. Prohibited from cutting down trees the Isi Bay community made use of the locally available material - driftwood. The communal gathering of wood from around the foreshore in the punt hauled by several dinghies became a uniquely Bay tradition.

The custom of restricting fancy-dress to locally found materials and objects started from necessity among people of straitened means, but became a part of the traditional celebration of the Rangitoto environment. Individual and communal creativity were manifest through the use of local flora and everyday items found around the bach. It led them to create natural themes for their costumes - robin-redbreast, pineapple. Others chose characters associated with outdoors and adventure that a holiday at Rangitoto meant, such as a fishergirl, Robinson Crusoe, Man Friday and Trader Horn. The portrayal of Maori is attributable to contemporary societal attitudes.

The New Year’s Day festivities utilised locally available materials and venues as well as celebrating activities associated with holidays. The Islington Bay dinghy races exemplified the activities of the holiday. The Bay afforded a long stretch of relatively calm water suitable to dinghy racing using the compass dolphin as a starting marker. The open coast at the Wharf not being suitable for dinghy racing, the Wharf community held a fishing competition. Fishing being the main holiday activity was celebrated with competitions for the largest, longest, lightest and most unusual fish.

The flat area by the channel on Motutapu provided an excellent sports field for the running races at Isi Bay but...
without such an area the wharf community used their swimming pool. Similarly the beach at Motutapu was the inspiration for the Bay sandcastle competition.

**Fancy-dress**

The ancient tradition of fancy-dress comes from medieval Europe. It is associated with festivals such as carnival when, for a day or three, the world was turned upside down (Burke 1978:182). Camouflaging identity with masks and costumes was an integral part of these celebrations where authority was mocked and role reversal gave expression to discontent or disapproval.

As a holiday amusement fancy-dress was very popular at the time. It was an opportunity to be creative with one’s own costume and break down formality by reducing everyone to the ridiculous. The vice-versa parties held at Rangi Wharf were a direct descendant of this type of festivity where role reversal was the cause of amusement.

Transforming oneself into something else, letting go of the everyday persona within the bounds of societal values was normally restricted to festival occasions. However those who went outside these times were considered odd and not entirely approved of.

Phil Lewis had been a showman on the stage in Birmingham and he couldn’t get over it. He was a very flamboyant person and had an ego that would choke a donkey. When the ferry came in on a Sunday morning he sometimes made it his business to go along with his big floppy hat on, a pair of lady’s pyjamas and a Japanese umbrella and he would walk down the wharf yodelling and making an exhibition of himself.

On the other hand when a person’s ‘oddness’ became part of their persona it was accepted.

Hori Stewart was a character. He used to wander round with a silk top hat on. He used to make musical instruments - flutes and things. He was a one man band. He was quite clever really. He’d be banging the drums and had a mouth organ rigged up and he’d be playing the trumpet with cymbals between his knees.

**Alcohol**

Alcohol consumption has traditionally been associated with celebration and holiday. ‘In New Zealand society, having a drink, by which one understands that it is an alcoholic drink, is a way of demarcating time off from work (Herda: 1993:19). However, in the 1920s New Zealand drinking was primarily a male indulgence and regarded with some disapproval, as the consumption of alcohol had been blamed for the neglect of women and families. The Temperance Societies had been influential in restricting public drinking hours and premises and prohibitionists had created dry areas. The frontier town image where every second establishment was a pub was frowned upon. The state viewed drinking as undermining the family stability it was endeavouring to foster (Chapter Three).

At Islington Bay alcohol was not part of the festivities until the later period, because it was deemed inappropriate in a family orientated community.

There was no booze, partly because all the bach-holders had families. It wasn’t a prim and proper place but it wasn’t a boisterous one. There was no drunken revelry until the hall was put up.

Alcohol gradually came into use with new comers and socialising in the hall. The ruling that no alcohol was to be consumed in the hall was common for New Zealand community dance halls. The change in attitudes and the separation of public and private socialising allowed people to drink. When Islington Bay hall was used for community socialising people could go to their private baches to drink.

The New Year’s dance would be going on at the hall and little groups would leave. Someone would say, ‘Come round to our place for a spot’, and all the lamps would be going to the different baches. No drink driving worries there. Then they would come back and have another dance. Marvellous.

And if you went walking around the foreshore past the baches, ‘Hello, have a cup of tea’. Well, until finally you got tea indigestion. Now it is, ‘Come in and have a drink’.

At the Wharf which had a group of single men attached to the Workingmen’s Club, alcohol had always been part of private leisure but was restricted to the baches. Drinking was accepted in the community as long as it was in private and not abused.

Originally it was banned. But then as the newer people came and that regime went, it came back. Apart from these functions (in the kiosk) there were cottages where there would be all men and they would booze but they never came out and annoyed anyone else. As long as there were children there was no drinking. No drinking before a certain hour - no drinking after a certain hour. Those were the club rules.

There was a bit of drinking there. Nobody used to give trouble - we enjoyed our drinks. No drinks sold at the tearooms. At the dances we would go out and have our drinks in the baches.

**Community identity**

An element identified by Burch (1969:82) as characteristic of community is that ‘community members have a sense of belonging to a particular territory with a distinctive history and fund of meanings. They have a sense of being part of a particular aggregation and view it as being distinctive enough to be set apart from other similar
aggregations'. This is very evident in these communities where people spoke of things being particular to their community.

The Rangi Wharf community identified a role for itself as caretakers and protectors of the island for the general public in the way of firefighting, lifesaving and keeping out exotic plants.

I always emphasised that we were not there for ourselves alone. We are here to make ourselves honorary wardens and they (Rangitoto Domain Board) recognised that in an unofficial way.

Each community felt itself to be of different character and independent of the other.

They were little communities unto themselves. It wasn't that they didn't like one another but I think because they were so independent that you really didn't have a lot to do with one another

There was a sort of enmity existed between the two ends. A jealousy. When Reg went down to the Bay to start the shop down there. People got a bit upset. They thought they owned him.

I may have it all wrong. But my feeling is that the people at Isi Bay thought they were a cut above the little tin sheds they had at Rangi Wharf. They really were very rumpity little houses around at Rangi Wharf. They were nearly all made of corrugated iron and they were very small. They were like outside loos with the washhouse attached and that was the sort of place they looked like. Whereas ours were bigger than those because most of the people in my era had two or three children and parents and others to come and stay and needed space. They didn't seem to have many children at Rangi Wharf.

The change at Islington Bay

The consequences of change at Islington Bay have been discussed in Chapter Seven, however, it is worthwhile reiterating some of the feelings expressed by my informants. Their ideas about the ethos of community were particularly prominent when they talked about this period.

Many mentioned that it was the building of the hall at Islington Bay that ruined the sense of 'community' based on informal, friendly, co-operation. They felt that formal organisation and activity was inappropriate in a holiday community. When the hall was built informal gatherings in each others' baches became less frequent. The Bach-holders Association formed in 1933 laid down rules for the use of the hall with the consequence that functions were less spontaneous. Additionally, the formality of the organisation, election of officers and delegation of authority, previously allotted to the most able by informal consensus, caused argument and ill feeling.

The building of the hall changed the community. It did in that there was less visiting in each others' homes.

The hall got us a bit more civilised. Prior to the hall I would say we were a closer knit community - a bit more primitive. Some people were against the hall - these modern things. They said, 'You can get that all back in Auckland - the hall and tennis courts. We came here to get away from it'.

I think it probably was a good community until they got a little too ambitious. The start of the hall and all that. They started to quarrel.

People explained the diminishing of 'community' as due to the lessening of the need to rely on each other for assistance. When the original baches, boat ramps and sheds were in place and the new baches were being built by contractors there was less opportunity for reciprocity in sharing labour and resources. Reg Noble's supply service wharf (later a store) left little excuse to borrow 'the bit of flour'.

I think the early people relied on each other more - they built their own places. We had someone to put up the framing and we did the rest of it. So there was that, 'You help me and I'll help you' which afterwards there didn't have to be to the same degree as builders built the baches or they were already there. Co-operation died when richer people came in - well the spirit died.

Indeed, social unity was fractured when different levels of economic standing became apparent with the arrival of more affluent people. It was a holiday community where a person's status in 'town life' had been unimportant. The community had valued its egalitarianism and lack of ostentation. The sense of 'being in the same boat' fostered by inventiveness and 'making-do' was lost when people arrived who had no need for such methods.

Those houses came towards the end of the Depression when people had a bit more. They were able to make more of a splash than we early ones. We were sort of pigging it through the Depression years. We actually felt very privileged that during those years we were able to have a beach house to go to.

Community was associated with communal activity in which everyone participated. When this no longer happened people felt 'community' had gone.

That was the part that was so nice, when everybody was a nice unit; and then it just became a lot of tentacles going out. Everybody just did a different thing, it wasn't a community. When we used to go and fetch all the wood for the bonfire everyone would be in. All that sort of movement went ... It wasn't the same sort of thing after the people came.

When ways of doing things which the 'originals' had come to regard as 'traditional' were changed it was considered
as contributing to the breakdown of community. The communal gathering of wood for the bonfire gave way when the hall was built; newcomers brought ready-made fancy-dress from town; informal gatherings in baches became less frequent and the custom of awarding small inexpensive prizes was supplanted by a donated cup. The new ways were those common to the larger populace. People felt that the specialness of their community was diminished. The community no longer ‘owned’ unique ways of doing things.

All the prizes were children’s prizes and the adults got them and gave them to their children. But then one man decided he would be a bit better than others so he donated a cup. That caused a lot of dissatisfaction amongst people - it became competitive. It didn’t matter when they were getting only little wooden Indian canoes and whatnots to give to their kids. But when there was a cup involved it became a different atmosphere. And that is what my father was all against. He liked the nice family sort of thing. But competition came in and then came the committees and people falling out.

Accounting for differences between the two communities.

The communities at Rangitoto Wharf and Islington Bay attracted people who knew each other, were related or, had some common interests. Everyone who was prepared to establish a holiday home and live in rather primitive circumstances must have shared characteristics of adventure and love of the outdoors. Away from their everyday life and living in different circumstances people felt an ongoing social unity. A spirit of communitas developed amongst people in extra-ordinary circumstances.

While both communities esteemed qualities of friendliness, co-operation, inclusion and having fun, each thought of itself as unique and developed ‘traditions’ which were valued for their association with their special place. And although they developed sets of shared values based on communal activity and co-operation, the experience of the two communities was different. External and internal factors contributed to the differing community life histories.

Islington Bay

Islington Bay was isolated. Until the first jetty was built in 1925 it was serviced by a launch contracted by the bach-holders themselves. Before the road to Rangitoto Wharf was completed in 1933 there was no access to provisions or the caretaker. For the first decade there were no public facilities and socialising was informal, either outdoors or in baches. Members of this community relied on each other for help in bach building, supplies and social contact. Due to these factors the families attracted to this community were inclined to be more self-sufficient. The kinship groups and friends built up a community founded on an ethic of co-operation, fun and informal socialising. They valued their independence and uniqueness. Belonging to the working class they felt very privileged to have a holiday home.

The original group had been together for some ten years before the road, the hall and the influx of wealthier people arrived. The small community underwent great change in a short space of time. The introduction of formal socialising, organisation and displays of wealth brought about a change to ‘the common fund of motives and mutual expectations’ (Burch 1969:83). Many felt the changes destroyed the original sense of community.

Rangitoto Wharf

The Wharf community was established in an area already equipped with facilities. The wharf and paths built in the late 1890s provided access for bach-holders and the visiting public. The kiosk, though privately owned, served as the centre of social activities and provided for daily needs. The island’s caretaker lived amongst the residents and they enjoyed a close association with the Devonport Domain Board.

The established facilities attracted steady growth during the 1920s. Amongst the kinship and friendship groups that took up lessees the community spirit of caring for each other was a natural extension of ‘family life’. There was a continuous flow of people into the community who, for the most part, entered into the spirit of the established community ethos. Those who did not, either did not join in or left. Core values, therefore, were maintained by the majority while new ideas, such as alcohol use, were assimilated. Change came gradually, thus minimising conflict.

The most important facility for the Wharf community was the tearooms where social functions were held. Unlike Islington Bay, these functions were always formally organised and therefore there was not the great change in procedure as there was when the hall was built at Islington Bay. Later facilities provided by the Domain Board and prison labour, (the play area and the swimming pool) though designed for the enjoyment of the visiting public were also of benefit to the community. Although the bach-holders raised funds for the play equipment and lent a hand in maintaining the swimming pool they were not directly involved in either the planning for or creating these facilities. The Islington Bay bach-holders, by comparison, petitioned the Domain and Harbour Boards, raised money and laboured on their jetty.

Summary

It would seem that the traditional image of colonial society could be applied to the Islington Bay community. Isolated and with little help from the Rangitoto Domain Board the community developed an ethic of caring, sharing and interdependence. When it came more under the control of authority and communications were improved and its isolation penetrated by ‘different’ people, community, as
valued by the ‘originals’, diminished. Indeed, they felt a sense of loss of their uniqueness.

The Rangitoto Wharf community on the other hand, had always been dependent upon authority for the provision of facilities and the comparatively good access ensured visitors and provisions. Life was certainly easier in this less isolated settlement. They too developed community cohesion, communal caring and sharing without the need to be so self-reliant.

The best tool for the analysis is Turner’s ‘communitas’ model - by which he means social unity temporarily present where social structure is not. On Rangitoto, outside their everyday, all year, lives, people enjoyed being together and developed a social unity based on common values.

However, as Rangitoto Wharf with its shop and kiosk was more akin to urban life, social structure was more prominent and social unity ‘communitas’ was more dependent on formal organisation. Due to their close association with the Domain Board and exposure to the outside world formal organisation was necessary to maintain social unity.

At isolated Islington Bay, unfettered by daily incursions from the caretaker, and without facilities provided by the Domain Board, people developed ‘communitas’ through self-reliance, common interest and natural predisposition to socialise. Change came when closer intercourse with authority was made possible by the building of the road. The community was fragmented by the necessity for formal organisation due to the new facilities and increasing population. It is then that ‘communitas’ is perceived to have died.

Conclusions

In my introduction I quoted J. and J. Comaroff as saying that historical ethnography was a useful and necessary tool for modern societies to know where they have been because an understanding of relationships in past societies helps with the understanding of our present (1922:5). Furthermore community analysis is a means of capturing the nuances of social change in societies confronted with rapid change (Pearson 1979:15).

All the communities on Rangitoto existed in a time of change. The adults had lived through a devastating war which they believed had altered for ever the world as they knew it. Nevertheless an optimism pervaded the national psyche. State assistance in building an educated and healthy population led to innovations in all areas of life. The 1920s were also a time of opening up to less conservative tastes in manners, art, music and fashion.

People of these communities held aspirations to build a society for their children centred around normalising their surroundings. They sought to bring up their children with family and community values of sharing and co-operation. Some, having rural backgrounds or perhaps holding the image of pioneering communities, sought to create such an atmosphere for a short time each year. However, the Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s affected this class of people although they were not among the desperately unemployed. In the face of hard times people retreated to more conservative values (Olssen 1981:275). On Rangitoto perhaps the nature of ‘traditional’ community was recreated as a bastion against the confusion of their everyday life as the Depression brought to an end the new society they had envisioned would be created after World War I.

This study of the Rangitoto communities has provided a glimpse into a microcosm of our society; their establishment, functioning and transition in the face of change. As well as giving a detailed picture of the daily life and special celebrations, it gives insights into their character, aspirations and prejudices. Such a study is an important link in the continuum of New Zealand society. It also serves as a resource for further study of interwar societies in a state of transition.
AFTERWORD

As in the wider New Zealand society, World War II brought profound changes to the Rangitoto communities. For the duration of the War the island was off-limits to the public as it was taken over for military purposes. Access to baches was limited to maintenance visits once a month. When people were allowed back on the island many of the originals were of retirement age. Several couples began to live semi-permanently on the island. This was made possible by the improved facilities such as the roads, shop, post office and telephone. Some baches were made more comfortable with generators for light and refrigeration and indoor running water.

The reconstituted communities, however, had a different population with varying needs and concerns with the consequence that interaction and relationships within them changed. The small group of older permanent residents now had to interact with one another much more frequently than they had done in intermittent holiday times when there had been a larger and younger population. This was exacerbated by the conflicting interests of the permanent older residents and the young family weekend visitors. Furthermore, the caretaker who also ran shops in both communities and owned the means of land transport became a powerful figure on Rangitoto. A permanent population required more of his services and the exercise of the administrative authority given him by the Domain Board. He was also responsible for contracting maintenance work out to residents who sought extra income. Fondly remembered as the King of Rangitoto, Reg Noble’s supremacy on the island was unchallenged. Despite this the communities continued to function as places of caring and sharing while adapting and adding to the traditions as times changed.

As leaseholders died the lawfully authorised destruction of baches became more and more frequent towards the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, angering and saddening the
community. For although they were aware that the baches would go they had not anticipated the heartless method in which it was done. Families had scarcely removed their possessions before the bach was set alight by the new caretaker. (A recklessly dangerous method to use on Rangitoto). Enormous anger was generated at the destruction of the kiosk and shop at Rangitoto Wharf in April 1982. Not only had the residents not been informed that it was to be demolished, they had cleaned the shop in preparation for anticipated new lessees. In both communities other facilities - the St Johns Ambulance Hut, the children's playground, were either removed or allowed to deteriorate. The demise of these facilities which represented years of effort in fund raising, communal work and the care and respect for the area the communities were proud of, epitomised the increasingly acrimonious relationship with the new authority - Hauraki Maritime Parks Board.

Over the years natural attrition through death of the leaseholders has disbanded the communities. Nevertheless those remaining maintain close bonds and continue the community spirit on the island.

Since the transfer to the Department of Conservation, in early 1990s, interest has been raised in preserving some of the remaining Rangitoto baches as representative of bach communities, once prevalent throughout the country, that have now been replaced by the 'holiday home' or engulfed by suburbia. It is recognised that baches represent a quintessential aspect of New Zealand's social history and, as icons of kiwiana, they deserve a place in the conservation of New Zealand's built heritage.
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Unpublished sources

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[Note: Graham MS 120 is held in photocopy at the Auckland Institute and Museum Library].
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ENDNOTES

1. Knees are curved wooden pieces, one used for the bow and two, for the stern. Naturally curving wood is preferred as it is stronger than straight wood which has been bent.
2. Lapstreak - overlapping boards.
3. From Lancashire.
4. A causeway built by the army in 1937 obstructed the flow of water in the channel causing silting. The channel is considerably shallower now.
5. A compass dolphin is a round non-magnetic concrete structure.
6. Applications date from August 1911 but locations are not recorded.
7. Davidson had applied for a camp site in 1914 did not build on it then.
8. Deliberately scuttled ships at Boulder Bay on the northern coast were stripped of useful items.
9. My informants were children or young adults at this time. Their recollections of these incidents are their impressions gleaned from conversations of adults more directly involved.
10. All informants are Protestant.
RESEARCH IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND LINGUISTICS

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Authors will be asked to supply a brief summary (<100 words) of their work and biographical details for inclusion on the rear cover.
Susan Yoffe's interest in anthropology was aroused during nearly twenty years of living in several developing countries. In 1989 she began studying for a BA at The University of Auckland, majoring in Social Anthropology and New Zealand History. In 1993 she graduated Master of Arts in Anthropology with First Class Honours. Since then she has worked as tutor and assistant lecturer at The University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology and Massey University at Albany. She is currently an independent researcher in social history and anthropology.

After completing her thesis, Susan was contracted to do further research into bach histories for the Department of Conservation. In 1997 the Rangitoto Historic Conservation Trust was formed with the purpose of preserving the bach communities as they remain today. Susan undertook the researching of histories and assembling the archival material of the communities. A history of each bach has been written, both those still existing and demolished. Over fifty oral histories have been recorded. Susan talks on the Rangitoto holiday communities to interested groups.

Since 1991 when the Department of Conservation took over the administration of Rangitoto no baches have been demolished. The Rangitoto Island Historic Conservation Trust is currently in negotiation with the Department of Conservation to maintain the baches and make them available for public use.