

The Burkes Pass Heritage Trust Newsletter

September 2013



Lightning Strike to our Historic Oak Tree

A spectacular and violent lightning storm struck the historic oak tree at the centre of Burkes Pass Township on Tuesday the 10th Sept. This devastating blow to this well-loved tree was described in an email that night from Dave Taylor and Kim; “We have just experienced probably the worst lightning storm here in the Pass for many years and sadly it has taken out the oak tree in front of Dave’s house. Split her clean down the middle and peeling back the bark, throwing debris up onto the veranda of the house like a bonfire - crazy, and all over the road, branches everywhere. This is so sad for the community as it has been a favourite for all to enjoy both in summer for shade and in winter for its beauty in the snow”.

This landmark tree was planted on June the 23rd 1897 to mark the 60th Jubilee of Queen Victoria and transplanted as a 20 year old tree from the Burkes Pass cemetery. Malcolm McLeod, Chairman of the Burkes Pass School Committee did the honours. It was recounted that ‘the tree was planted in the early hours after great rejoicings and that many a pint was poured around the young tree to help it along. At this same Jubilee the blacksmith, who was experimenting with gunpowder to make a suitable flare, emerged from one of his experiments with his face blackened and his hair singed.’ This explosive start was certainly eclipsed by Mother Nature’s fireworks last week. (Ref; ‘Burkes Pass – Portal to the Mackenzie’ written by Mrs W.G. Jamieson)



An Intriguing Find at Anniss Cob Cottage

This sturdy little cottage built of clay is slowly being repaired and its features emerging again. It was abandoned in 1911 when the John and Margaret Anniss, who built it for their family home, won a balloted farm at Curraghmore Station, and as well as the usual family possessions, they removed the roofing iron (a valuable resource for a future construction) and took it with them, leaving the rest of the building exposed to the elements. Replaced in 2006, the iron gave the necessary shelter for wall repairs to proceed and the original shape to slowly reform as each batch of clay and tussock mixture is applied by hand. In a last session before risks of heavy frosts arrived this year, after excavating down through the pile of weathered clay at the base of the wall to the rock foundation, we came upon some interesting artefacts. Underneath years of deep accumulated debris the original door lock was lying just where the door presumably rotted. Under a windowsill a set of ancient cutlery, bone handled knife, fork and spoon were found with the vague remnants of an old tin plate. Was it from the last meal before they left or was someone having a picnic in the shelter of the walls and left in a hurry?

In Brief

- The ice rink did freeze this year – yay! While not quite ready for use, it was great to see that it will work and will be fun to have our own local rink.
- The new church windows are getting closer on glass conservator, Graham Stewart’s, list so watch this space.
- The Rowan tree avenue has had a bit of a beating from cattle and some branches required emergency first aid bandaging. One or two trees may not survive so a rethink of protection may be required.
- Welcome to Julie Greig and family, who have moved into the shop and we look forward to seeing her amazing art and stunning horses. www.juliegreig.co.nz
- Can anyone shed light on the name for “Yellow Hill’ along Rollesby Road? I have a glimmer of memory from many years ago seeing it looking bright yellow with what appeared from the car window to be an amazing crop of native Maori Onion flowers (*Bulbinella hookerii*), or was I seeing things? They are a bulb that grows in sub alpine pastures,

have a bright yellow flower spike in July/August and are about 0.3-0.7m tall. I would love to get some seed/bulbs if anyone knows of any growing locally to plant in our native roadside landscaping.

- Rollesby Station now sports a very sculptural entrance sign made appropriately from ancient bulldozer track and horseshoes.

Burkes Pass Karearea /Native NZ Falcon

A very streamlined resident of Burkes Pass Valley airspace, seen crossing daily over our paddocks and trees, is the native falcon. Featured on the NZ \$20 note, it is a spectacular and fearless bird often flying around one hundred km/h but recorded up to 230 km/h and catching prey many times larger than itself. It has been fully protected as a threatened species since 1970 but is still declining in numbers, now rarer than kiwi with estimates of less than 1500 breeding pairs. Dr Donna Falconer, a Twizel enthusiast, tells me they do not build a nest but make a scrape on the ground, under a rocky outcrop and are probably nesting in the nearest hill faces. They pair up in July and may establish their scrape during Aug/early Sept. and you will see both birds coming and going from this.

While their ground nests are vulnerable to predators such as cats and stoats, apparently toxins (pindone/1080) and electrocution are their biggest threats in the Mackenzie. Often confused with the Harrier hawk that is commonly seen feeding on road-kill, the falcon is half the size, rarely feeds on carrion but likes to kill its own food (fresh is best) and more often seen in active chasing flights with rapid wing beats rather than the lazy flights of the Harrier.

While working on Anniss cottage recently I saw one dispatching a rabbit about 50 m away and then chasing off a second falcon who was trying to get a share of it. On another occasion Graham and a friend were standing on the roof of the cottage about 1-2 meters apart when a falcon came screaming through diving between them chasing another bird at about chest height and ducked and dived around until eventually they disappeared from view. A manoeuvre worthy of the Americas Cup.



Best wishes
Jane Batchelor

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