Auckland Regional Parks 50th Anniversary Legacy Project

Friends of Regional Parks and Mahurangi Action propose that the concept for a Mahurangi Coastal Trail described here be adopted by Auckland Council as the Auckland Regional Parks 50th anniversary, legacy project.

It is further proposed that the project be formally announced on the Sunday of Auckland Anniversary weekend 2016, at a ‘people’s fundraiser’ celebrating the anniversary, at Wenderholm, and dedicated to the vision and actions of the fathers of regional parks network, Fredrick WO Jones and Arnold R Turner CMG, that led to the purchase of that first regional park, and its opening in the summer of 1965–66.

A ‘celebrity fundraiser’ will be held on 1 November 2015 at Tu Ngutu Villa, Mahurangi West, to provide Auckland Council with early evidence of the high level of public support that the Mahurangi Coastal Trail concept enjoys.

The Mahurangi Coastal Trail will link the first park purchased by the regional council, Wenderholm, with the last it purchased, Te Muri.

Organisational

Friends of Regional Parks and Mahurangi Action have resolved to form a working group to pursue the Mahurangi Coastal Trail as the Auckland Regional Parks 50th anniversary, legacy project, and to establish a charitable trust, to be named the Mahurangi Coastal Trail Trust, capable of achieving non-profit tax exemption status, to the same end.

Synopsis

This document looks at options for the coastal trail within Te Muri Regional Park and makes recommendations for track development and river crossings.

Background

Te Muri is at the centre of three adjoining regional parks, with Mahurangi to the north and Wenderholm to the south. Together they total 900 hectares of regional parkland—the whole of which exceeds the sum of the individual parks.

The coastline of Te Muri was purchased in 1973 as part of the Mahurangi Regional Park, and was extended by a $15million purchase of 407 hectares of adjacent farmland in 2010.

Te Muri is unique in that it provides a pristine beach that is free of commercial and residential development, and of public road access. It has a charm that approaches that of the much-vaunted New Chums Beach in the Coromandel, yet is less than 40km from downtown Auckland.

At a meeting of the Auckland Council’s parks, recreation and sport committee in October 2015, in response to a deputation organised by Mahurangi Action, it was resolved that the council would proceed with the preparation of a Te Muri Concept Plan, which will include options for how the new and previously purchased parkland might be developed.

A principal purpose of this document is to ensure that access to Te Muri Regional Park via a Mahurangi Coastal Trail, and Te Muri as a section of Te Araroa, the national walkway, is robustly considered as part of the Te Muri Concept Plan process. Te Araroa Trust is aware of this proposal and watches on with interest. Once
Auckland Council’s position is established, the trust will further consider the merits of Te Muri becoming a part of the national walkway.

**Why do anything?**

1. To provide better public access to this gem of Auckland Council’s regional park portfolio in a way that enhances its charm and its unique location.
2. To address the safety risk of wading across Te Muri Estuary on the falling tide—during the first phase of a falling tide the current can be particularly strong, and crossing hazardous.
3. To provide a means of crossing the Pūhoi River to and from Wenderholm. The Pūhoi River can only be crossed, by wading, at low tide. Wenderholm is only a short walk from Waiwera, which has an hourly bus service to and from midtown Auckland.

**Principal options include:**

1. Do nothing
2. Link the parks together with tracks, and ferries or footbridges
3. Provide a separate road access from State Highway 1 via Hungry Creek Road with on-site parking.

**Do nothing**

The current access to Te Muri is from the car park above Sullivans Bay within the Mahurangi Regional Park. The access from the car park to the bay is down a metalled farm track to Te Muri Estuary. The stream can be crossed by shallow wading below half tide. On the falling tide between full tide and half tide, the stream flow can be strong, and it can be hazardous to cross.

There is no defined access from the south. At Wenderholm there is a boat ramp with a wharf but no similar access point at Te Muri to the north. Hungry Creek Road accesses the farm from inland (State Highway 1) but this is a locked private farm road and currently unsuitable as a public highway for park access.

**Possible links within the three regional parks**

*Within the park at Te Muri*  This would involve a footbridge crossing of Te Muri Estuary for pedestrians and cycles to provide all-tide access to Te Muri from Ngārewa Drive, Mahurangi West.

*To the north*  Access to Mahurangi East is only by boat. A ferry or water taxi from Sullivans Bay or Ōpahi Bay might eventually be available. It is envisaged that a wharf structure at Ōpahi Bay, Mahurangi West would provide water taxi access to Scotts Landing and Mahurangi Regional Park – West as well as Motuora Island. *Details of linking options are given later in this document.*

*To the south*  Access to Wenderholm may be provided by a track to a wharf structure on the north side of the Pūhoi River to link by ferry or water taxi to the existing wharf at the Wenderholm boat ramp. An alternative would be to construct a footbridge across the Pūhoi River near the Schischka Homestead. Wenderholm is only a short walk from Waiwera, which has a direct bus (No. 895) access from Auckland City running with a one-hour frequency.
Provide separate access with on-site parking

This would involve a major upgrade of Hungry Creek Road from a one way metalled farm track to sealed two-way road (4.5km long). Car parking for 1000–2000 cars has been suggested in the past. For this option, the road alone is likely to cost in excess of $3 million, as well as destroying the sense of isolation that is a major component of the charm of the location.

Te Araroa trail

The current proposed route for this trail from Pūhoi to Wenderholm is along the south bank or the river. This route is currently unavailable because of landowner access issues. An alternative is to use Hungry Creek Road, provided that it does not become a public vehicle access route to the park. This route would require a crossing of the Pūhoi River by ferry or footbridge to Wenderholm as described above in the Links within the Parks. Even if the south bank route is adopted, the Hungry Creek route still offers a highly scenic alternative, or loop route, for walkers.

Sea kayak trail

The parks with their remote camping experiences available at Te Muri and Mita Bay are totally compatible with the proposed sea kayak trail.

Key linkage for the Mahurangi Coastal Trail

The river crossings of the Pūhoi River and Te Muri Estuary are clearly the critical links.

The Te Muri Estuary crossing is needed to provide all-tide access and options are described below. The crossing proposed is a simple boardwalk structure raised only sufficiently high to allow kayakers to creep under it.

The Pūhoi River Crossing is far more challenging and requires a very long footbridge. It also requires provision for the passage of small boats to the upper reaches and possibly as far as Pūhoi, the original limit of navigation.

Detailed proposals for these links are discussed later in this document but first the history and the environmental issues are reviewed.

History of the site

The information below is mainly taken from Jade River: A History of the Mahurangi.

The site has a long history with the mana whenua Te Kawerau and Ngāti Rongo and more specifically with Te Hemara and Pomare of those tribes.

The land was originally purchased by the government as the Mahurangi and Omaha blocks in 1841.

Land sales commenced in 1853 after establishing the Parihoro and Hemara reserves. The Hemara Reserve extended from the Pukapuka inlet to the Waiau River. The far western part of the Hemara block was bought back by the government the following year. Te Hemara and his people had previously sort refuge in the Bay of Islands from warring tribes. Te Hemara returned to the reserve with 100 people and resided at the south head of the Mahurangi Harbour. There was a timber camp at Te Muri in 1859.
In 1866 the balance of the Hemara Reserve was subdivided amongst the chief and the sub chiefs as required by the Maori Land Court. Te Hemara was granted the block from Te Muri to Waiwera together with a similar size block to the north. Pomare was granted various lands including the Nokenoke block, the site of their kāinga was on the flat behind the cemetery creek at Te Muri. There was a church built in 1868 on the Pomare kāinga (It is understood that this was later barged to Wenderholm to become the Whitney room at Couldrey house). The kāinga was also recorded as containing 10 whare and orchards and the indications are that this was to the west of the small stream behind the beach whereas the cemetery was to the east of this stream.

Te Hemara had sold most of his land by 1873. The exception was 85 acres upstream of Wenderholm, which he sold to Schischka in 1895 leaving Te Hemara with just 5 acres. When Te Hemara died in 1896 this land was passed to Schischka to settle a debt. This land became the site of the Schischka family home until the land was finally sold to the Auckland Regional Council.
In 1885 Greenwood had purchased most of the Te Muri land. Greenwood had also bought much of the Wenderholm land from Graham and Ryan, with the intention of developing it as a seaside development. A depression occurred shortly after purchase and Greenwood went into bankruptcy. The details of the proposal are shown on the poster on the wall in Couldrey House (see following page). It is not known how much, or if any, of the development was actually carried out.
Te Hemara died in 1896.

Pomare had mortgaged his land in 1878, and when this was not paid off the land was sold to Dufaur in 1884.

The Te Muri (Nokenoke block) was past on to Wenzlick and then to Thomas Ansell and finally on to Edmund Schischka. The Ansell house was on the site of the Pomare kāinga and remained until the 1920s. There is some evidence of the house still existing and also of a chimney from a subsequent cottage.

The cemetery has been subject to hearings in 1945 and 1960. The cemetery that is currently fenced may be only a fraction of its original area.

Sixty-four hectares of coastal Te Muri land was purchased by in 1973, by the then Auckland Regional Authority. The balance of the farm, 407 Ha, was the final park acquisition by Auckland Regional Council, for $15million, in 2010 before that body was absorbed into the new Auckland Council.

**History of the Mahurangi Coastal Trail**

Before roads were constructed, travelling was either by boat or via the coastal trail. The construction of the Great North Road was being pursued but this was inland from Pūhoi to Moirs Hill, relatively near the summit. Coach services to Warkworth via this route were established in 1882. Rodney County Council makes reference to the coastal trail and its ferrymen in 1877 and 1888. The references to the service were to the lack of reliability. The council agreed to pay half the cost of the ferrymen at the Pūhoi River mouth and at Mahurangi (Ōpaheke to Scotts Landing) during that year.

**Environmental Issues**

_Summary of environmental implications, from a historical perspective._

The evidence of a varied occupation by Maori and subsequent Pākehā needs to be respected. The high land to the north of Te Muri Estuary towards the headland was occupied by Maori. This could also include the hill near to Ngārewa Drive.

At Te Muri, the land around the cemetery is inadequately defined. The existing fencing is unlikely to correctly define the area. The main occupation was on the land on the opposite side cemetery creek and this is also best avoided.

South of Te Muri no specific reference of occupation is made but high land has probably been occupied. The hill opposite the Schischka Homestead may also have been occupied by Maori (M Vujcich, pers. comm.). The land south of the Pūhoi River has historical significance both at Wenderholm and at the Schischka Homestead.

In these areas care should be taken. If development is proposed, it should be by filling rather than excavation to avoid destroying any relics.

**Proposals for linking elements**

_Pūhoi River crossing_

Crossing points that could be considered are:-
A1. Upstream close to the Schischka Homestead
A2. In the vicinity of the boat ramp
A3. At the river entrance.

The river entrance has to cope with high tidal flows and any crossing structure would have to allow for yacht passage. The vicinity of the boat ramp would involve a long crossing and the profile of the riverbed in this area is subject to change. Consideration the options in more detail is as follows:- (for location see plan as per key below)

A1 – Pūhoi River footbridge close to Schischka Homestead
Long-term option for an upstream footbridge. The proposed construction is 50 spans of 6 metres. The first and last three spans would be sloping to achieve the desired 2-metre clearance over the remaining 44 spans. One of the spans over the main channel would be a lifting span. The lifting span should be designed to be relocatable should there be a major channel change at a future date. It is possible to walk around the foreshore except at high tide. The foreshore gets muddy as it approaches the side stream (know as Spaniards Creek) and the track needs to link with the onshore track at this point. To create all-tide access, a linking track over the bluff with some boardwalks and a 12-m footbridge across a side stream (know as Spaniards Creek) is suggested. (total $0.6m)

Consideration of other footbridge locations
Any crossing at the river entrance would have to cope with high tidal flows and any crossing structure would have to allow for yacht passage. A footbridge at the entrance is not recommended.

The vicinity of the boat ramp is a long crossing and the profile of the riverbed in this area is subject to change. A footbridge crossing in this location is not recommended.

A2 Pūhoi River ferry from existing boat ramp to wharf to north bank
Alternative wharf structure on north side of Pūhoi River. (30m long) ($60k)

A3 Pūhoi River ferry closer to river entrance
Medium term additional wharf structure on south side. (20m long) ($40k + $60k for A2)

Track within Te Muri Regional Park

B Improved farm track up to saddle 400m. (The existing track will require regrading to achieve a 1 in 8 gradient and provide better viewpoints). ($33.5k)

C Benched track in farm paddock 450m (approx 1 in 10, initially grassed but may require metal dressing). ($36k)

D Track in farm paddock behind beach top. Level on sandy base. It is envisaged that this would within a planted pohutukawa buffer zone from the beach and offer an alternative route to walking along the beach. ($10k)

F Crossing of inlet downstream of the cemetery. 50m boardwalk. ($38k) (This may not be essential as an alternative track can be provided to a
crossing further upstream near the cottage. Note that the existing footbridge at this point needs upgrading to a short boardwalk.)

H  Paddock perimeter track. Some grading and 1–3m footbridge. Maintenance by mowing. ($10k)

Te Muri Estuary crossing

Crossing points that could reasonably be considered are:-
I  Immediately upstream of the farm road and adjacent pohutukawa.
J–K  Further upstream through a small island and to the paddock to the north.
L–M  Further upstream again at the kauri-clad bluff.

Consideration the options in more detail is as follows:-
(for location, see plan as per key below)

I – Farm-Road Crossing - estimate $165k
Farm-Road Crossing of Te Muri Estuary to upstream of the pohutukawa tree. 150m boardwalk (50 spans of 3 m) and 30m footbridge (5 spans of 6m).

J – Direct Crossing - $196k including access track
Direct Crossing of Te Muri Estuary via small island then to existing paddock access, 45m boardwalk (15 spans of 3m), 20m island, 30m boardwalk (10 spans of 3m), 30m footbridge (5 spans of 6m), 99m boardwalk (33 spans of 3m).

K – Paddock crossing
150m will require some re-contouring to achieve 1 in 8 grade. Metalling will be required. It is envisaged that this paddock could eventually be revegetated with indigenous plants.

L – Upper Crossing - $301k including access track
Upper Crossing of Te Muri Estuary. Paddock crossing including a 69m boardwalk (23 spans of 3m), then a 30m footbridge (5 spans of 6m), 69m boardwalk (23 spans of 3m).

M – Bush track around base of hill to northwest 300m, maybe one third of which needs a boardwalk plus 220m of steep track and 300m of grassed track to Ngārewa Drive.

N – Existing track to car park. Existing track approx 1 in 8. No work required.

O – Ngārewa Drive car park extension if required.
Comments on Pūhoi River crossing

1. The proposal is to provide a footbridge crossing close to Schischka House. This site is favoured as it is already possible to wade the river at this point at low tide. The ‘Greenwood’ plan from the 1880s indicates a ford at this location. The flow here is not as extreme as at the heads and it is clear of the inshore bar. The riverbed is more stable here than anywhere nearer the entrance. Tidal flows at the entrance move sand in and out of the harbour depending on the prevailing sea conditions. Flows at the entrance have greater velocities and therefore a deeper channel can be expected in that location.

2. The design of the footbridge will be influenced by the historical stability of the channel. This needs a study of historical aerial photos. Flood flows and an assessment of the debris likely to be carried by the river under flood conditions will be required.

3. The main channel is currently closer to Schischka House but at times may have been adjacent to the rock shelf at the bluff opposite. The Greenwood plan of the 1880s seems to suggest the deeper water was on the opposite side at that time.

4. This crossing can either link with a walk around the foreshore or to a track over the bluff to the north at high water to link with the proposed Coastal Track to Te Muri.

5. Either option above would require a short footbridge across a side stream at ‘Spaniards Creek’ to avoid crossing soft mud banks in that area.

6. Navigation upstream of the proposed footbridge is limited by the State Highway 1 bridge near Pūhoi. The author considers that a similar height restriction at the proposed Schischka crossing site is probably not acceptable. The alternatives are: - 1. A Dutch-style lift bridge is therefore proposed for part of the main span, or 2. A bascule bridge on a rolling bearing in the style of the new Whangārei Harbour road bridge. Either footbridge would replace one 6-metre span and should be kept simple so that it can operate without an external power source. It also needs to be designed so that it can be relocated at minimal extra cost should the channel change over a period of time.

7. An alternative (A2), in the short term, is to create a landing on the north bank to suit a ferry by rowboat or small water taxi. Options 1 and 2 show positions with water at low tide although water depth at 1 is marginal at low tide.

8. An enhancement of this alternative is to provide a landing on the south side (A3) to minimise the crossing distance as the existing wharf a further 500 metres upstream.

The upstream footbridge A1 is the recommended option.

Comment on Te Muri Estuary crossing options

Background

Safety

Unlike the Pūhoi River, Te Muri Estuary empties almost completely by two hours before low tide, and is then little more than ankle deep—a set of stepping stones are used by some allowing crossing without wetting footwear. Crossing at other times can require anything from shallow wading to swimming, depending on how full the tide, on whether tides are neap or spring, and the height of the person crossing. The most potentially hazardous time to attempt to cross is early on an outgoing tide, particularly a spring tide, and particularly for weak- or non-swimmers, or those unaware of how to
traverse a rip. Crossing mostly occurs at one of two points: 1. At the terminus of the farm road. 2. At the river mouth. Of the two crossing points, the river mouth presents the greater potential hazard because the flow is concentrated and consequently considerably swifter than the crossing adjacent the farm road terminus. However, despite the potential danger, large numbers of people have enjoyed the challenge of crossing Te Muri Estuary for the 40 years since the parkland was purchased, without serious mishap.

Ecological
Te Muri Beach is essentially a sandspit, the head of which is an important breeding area for dotterels and oystercatchers. An unfortunate downside of the two currently most-used crossing points is that they lead walkers close by these nesting sites. While tape fences provide the nests themselves with some degree of protection, pedestrian traffic between the nests and the beach where the birds feed is highly disruptive to them. Two of the crossings discussed below (Direct and Upper) would reroute walkers well clear of the spit head and thus the nesting area.

Utility
The lack of an all-tide crossing severely limits reasonable public access to Te Muri Regional Park, particularly in the winter when many walkers are unprepared or unwilling to wade the estuary.

Crossing options
1. Farm-Road Crossing is the lowest-cost option but is visible from existing estuary crossing point, detracting from ‘pristine’ scenic value of the main body of the estuary, and from wading experience enjoyed by generations of Te Muri beach users. It also fails to adequately divert walkers from the ecologically sensitive spit head. It would, however, provide a conspicuous alternative to risk-taking, such as attempting to cross during a strongly flowing ebb tide.

2. Direct Crossing has less visual impact but is more expensive, including because, to minimise the sorts of risk-taking described above, a 200-metre connecting track immediately above the shoreline to the farm road terminus would be required. However, the main access to the Direct Crossing, from the north, would be via an existing farm road, upgraded, that forks from the metalled farm road at a point 150 metres from the start of the Direct Crossing. Fortuitously, the topography at this fork in the trail is such that the route to the Direct Crossing will naturally capture most park visitors whose objective is Te Muri. (Option 2a involves a gently curving alignment to aesthetically better blend with the immediate environment.)

3. Upper Crossing is significantly more expensive and track is difficult to construct.

The Direct Crossing is the recommended option. While the Farm-Road Crossing might, in some scenarios, be more effective in discouraging risk taking—such as where visitors enter the water with the intention of wading or swimming, only to find the depth or swiftness greater than anticipated, and are dissuaded from persisting by the visible presence of an adjacent bridge—the visual impact and diminishment of wilderness ambience would be significant.

Staging
Once the overall option of a coastal trail and Te Muri crossing options are decided, priority should be given to the Te Muri crossing. This could be
followed by landing facilities on the Pūhoi River and ultimately by the extension of the track, and a bridge crossing of the Pūhoi River.

**Structural design**

The boardwalks are a standard design similar to those built at Tāwharanui Regional Park.

The footbridge structures employ a footbridge design that uses 6-metre spans (maximum length of regular timber). The timber is used in an innovative way to form a composite span of minimum depth. This minimises cost and maximises the clearance under the footbridge.

**Why do we need to consider this project?**

1. Te Muri is an unspoilt coastal beach and this is a rare resource.
2. Because we all have an interest in selecting the right outcome.

**Why now?**

1. There is a growing demand for walking and cycling access.
2. It epitomises the goals of Auckland Council’s open spaces strategy.
3. There is a safety issue with crossing Te Muri Estuary.
4. Without a plan there is a chance that piecemeal, suboptimal, decisions could easily be made.
5. The planning process takes time. If the planning stage is complete, then funding opportunities are more likely to be successful because costs and timeframes will have already been determined.
6. Te Muri Regional Park represents a significant investment on Aucklanders’ behalf that needs to be realised by the provision of access that is consistent with the area’s splendid sense of isolation.
Standards

As per SNZ HB 8630:2004 Tracks and Outdoor Visitor Structures
User Group Day Visitor Group 2.
Modified as follows. Tracks 2.0m wide to allow cycling and access for
mowing Max gradient 1 in 8 (1 in 10 preferred)
Boardwalk structures 1.6m wide, max height 1.5m, no handrails. Footbridge
structures Te Muri 1.6m wide to allow quad bike access for park staff,
handrails both sides and a headroom clearance from the stream of 1.5 metres
at high water.

Footbridge at the Pūhoi River 1.27m wide, handrails both sides and a
headroom clearance from the stream of 2 metres at high water over at least 2
spans. At least one span also to have an opening ability is recommended to
allow access of larger boats to the State Highway 1 wharf, downstream from
Pūhoi. The current State Highway 1 bridge limits navigation above this to 2
metres only.

Costings

Parameter costing for this assessment includes 50% addition for GST and
allowance for fees and contingences. Rates to be verified.
Tracks $20-$60 per metre
Boardwalks $700 per metre
Footbridges $2000 per metre

Total cost using preferred options above $0.9m

Note
Use of volunteer labour can effectively halve the rates above, refer experience
at Tawharanui boardwalks.

Use of volunteer labour can allow the project to be completed much earlier
than would otherwise be the case for a fully funded council project.