

HAPPINESS, HEALTH, & OUTDOOR EDUCATION

THE STORY OF
THE PORT WAIKATO CHILDREN'S CAMP

1928-2003



ROSS GALBREATH

PORT WAIKATO CAMP SCHOOL TRUST
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Preface

On 27 December 1928 an excited group of children set out for the first Port Waikato camp. They gathered at Ferrybank, below Hamilton's Victoria Bridge, said goodbye to their parents, and boarded the paddle-steamer *Manuwai* for the journey down the river to Port Waikato. The newspapers reported their great camping adventure:

Off To The Sea The Children's Camp

With faces alight with happiness and wondrous anticipation, 180 children sailed from the Hamilton wharf this morning for Port Waikato, where, in the salubrious atmosphere of the open sea, they will spend 10 days under canvas. ...while some of the youngsters seemed a little tearful at the prospects of parting with their parents to enter what to them was the great unknown, they nevertheless seemed eager to be on the move to sample the new pleasures and adventures that lay ahead.... Seated at the piano aboard, Mrs Ross struck up a bright tune as the rope was cast off and, as the Manuwai swung round with the stream, cheers from the crowd of parents on the bank were responded to heartily.

By The Silver Sea Great Welcome After River Trip

On arrival at Port Waikato the local residents, European and native alike, turned out to give their young visitors a great welcome; transport was ready to take them to the camp about half a mile away, and within an hour the children were snugly settled down under canvas.

At one end of the camping grounds rows of tents provided sleeping accommodation for the boys, who numbered over a hundred, a large marquee with seating accommodation was used for meals, and a store room and cook house of fairly substantial nature was built. The girls' portion of the camp was divided from the boys' portion by the small stream.

From Reveille to Lights Out

Through the full period of the camp everything went according to timetable, starting with reveille and cocoa at 6.40, to be followed by a roll call, ablutions at the creek and saluting the flag before breakfast came along. During each day there were organised bathing parades, drill and recreation periods, intervals for meals, until 8.30 at night, when a long day came to a close. Then the bugle sounded "Lights out" and young Waikato laid down its collective head to dream of further triumphs on the following day.

At dawn tuis were calling their liquid song from the tops of the rimu trees, and the swish of the wings of wild pigeons could be heard overhead. There were many visitors. Good-natured Maoris came from the neighbourhood to conduct a haangi....

It has been a wonderful holiday for young Waikato at the seaside, and the children have to thank for it the Waikato Children's Camp League, an organisation formed at Hamilton.¹

Ever since this first camp in 1928-29 there have been camps at Port Waikato, and generations of children have enjoyed memorable times there.

How did the camp at Port Waikato come about? Who worked to establish it, and why? What changes have there been in the 75 years since then? And how is the camp remembered by the children who have been there and the adults who helped to give them their Port Waikato experience? This book sets out to relate some of that history.

1: Give the Poor Children a Holiday!

The Stormy Start of the Waikato Children's Camp League

The glowing newspaper accounts of the first Port Waikato camp glossed over the actual difficulties of that camp, and gave no indication of the arguments and the clash of strong personalities that had led up to it. In fact the camp came to be established at Port Waikato because its main organisers had been shut out from using an earlier camp-ground. To see how all this came about we need to go back a few years.

In the 1920s camping was becoming popular for family holidays and as healthy recreation for young people. Youth groups such as YMCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides all organised camps. Camps with plenty of outdoor activity and good food were also seen as a way of improving the health of the nation's children.

In Hamilton the idea of establishing a permanent camp for young people was raised in 1926. Support came from the recently formed Rotary club, which saw such a camp as a community asset it could help to provide, and from the YMCA, which wanted a site for its camps for boys. Thus a group of men from these and other organisations formed themselves into the Hamilton Community Camp Association, to work to set up a camp-site where the YMCA and other youth organisations could hold camps. With Dr F.M. ('Montie') Spencer as the chairman and most active worker, they found a site on the coast at Okete, near Raglan, made a down payment to secure it, and undertook to raise the balance of the cost. They called it 'Camp Fergusson' (in honour of the current Governor-General), and put up a corrugated-iron cookhouse and boatshed in time for the YMCA boys to set up their tents there in the summer of 1926-27.

But this was only the start. The Hamilton Community Camp Association still had to gain public support to raise the balance owing for the land. The Association was stacked with prominent people with good intentions but without the time or the inclination to do much actual work. They needed someone with the capacity, drive and commitment to organise a successful fund-raising campaign.

The man they turned to - the man of 'organising genius', as Dr Spencer called him - was William H. Paul.

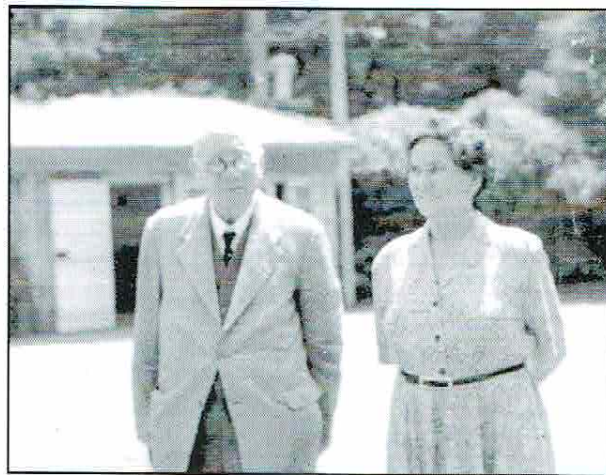
William Paul had come to New Zealand as a young man from Pontypool, Wales. He settled in Hamilton, where he had several jobs (including a spell in the office of the *Waikato Times*, which later gave him some useful contacts) before setting up in business as a bookseller under the name of Paul's Book Arcade. But he had the energy and drive for a whole range of community activities as well. He had been secretary-manager of the association which organised the annual Waikato Winter Show for 15 years already, and he went on running the show for decades more. And as president of the Hamilton Beautifying Society and chairman of the Domain Board, he organised and drove the planting of trees and the creation of parks and other improvements around the city. William Paul was a strong character - even his friends thought him high-handed - but very effective: 'Full of ideas and imagination, he backed his positive mental qualities with the energy and drive to ensure the success of his interests and undertakings. Obstacles were there to be swept aside and if his methods at times seemed dictatorial, the results were generally highly satisfactory.'

When William Paul was approached by the Hamilton Community Camp Association he was ready to assist, and he brought in a friend to help in the task: Mrs H.C. Ross.

Hilda Ross matched William Paul in drive, energy, and leadership, but where he was the general directing the troops, and always immaculate in waistcoat and tie, she led by example, ever ready to roll up her sleeves and help with the chores. Hilda Ross was a very determined woman, certain that women can do anything. Even her name demonstrated her independence and determination. Faced with the convention that wives not only took their husband's surname but were referred to under his initials as well, she found her own way around it. She had been born Grace Nixon, but when she married Harry Campbell Ross, she adopted the names Hilda Cuthberta so that the H.C. in Mrs H.C. Ross would be her own initials, not just his. Thereafter she was always Hilda.

Hilda Ross was a good pianist, which gave her work as a music teacher, and also brought her into community activities in Hamilton. She took a leading role in the Choral Society and the Operatic Society. In the latter she was not only the pianist but also - most unusually for a woman at this time - the conductor. She also led her own concert group, the 'Dandy Dozen', which gave concerts for worthy causes. In the Depression years Hilda Ross also turned her energies to welfare work, in the Unemployed Workers' Movement, in the Hamilton St Johns Association and as a voluntary child welfare worker.

William Paul and Hilda Ross agreed to assist the Hamilton Community Camp Association with their fundraising, but they set a few conditions. William Paul insisted on tighter financial and administrative controls - that the spending of the money raised and the management of the camp-ground should be determined by a small working committee rather than general meetings of the whole Association. He was also concerned that the Association was thinking only of the YMCA, Girl Guides and other established groups using its camp. 'What arrangements are being made in regard to poor children of the primary schools who do not belong to any of these properly-organised bodies?' William Paul asked. That aspect 'had never been considered', he was told. But it was these children, the children from struggling families who could never afford a proper holiday by the sea, who William Paul and Hilda Ross were most interested in helping, not the comfortably well-off children of the youth groups. William Paul and Hilda Ross told the Hamilton Community Camping Association that they would help with the fundraising for the new camp site on condition that they held camps for poor children as well.² The Association reluctantly agreed, sternly insisting that any poor children would have to be kept under 'strict order and discipline' at their camp.³



William Paul and Hilda Ross, originators and leaders of the Port Waikato Children's Camp.
(South Auckland Education Board collection)

William Paul and Hilda Ross actually built their fundraising campaign around their idea of providing holidays for poor children. William Paul launched a scheme of fundraising 'bonds', sold for 10 shillings each, the proceeds to go towards providing a ten-day's holiday for a boy or girl at Camp Fergusson. He arranged for publicity in the *Waikato Times*: 'Buy a Bond and give a child a holiday'.⁴ Hilda Ross took her Dandy Dozen on a series of concerts to raise money for the same cause. Both bonds and concerts were very successful and between them raised five times as much as all the rest of the Association's activities that year.

William Paul and Hilda Ross not only did the fundraising, but also proceeded to organise the promised poor children's camps themselves. These camps were fitted in at Camp Fergusson during January 1928, after the YMCA had held their boys camp.⁵ William Paul ran a camp for ten days for boys and then Hilda Ross ran another for girls. They made sure there were plenty of newspaper reports on the progress of their camps and the activities of their 'happy party of youngsters', and even arranged a visit by the local Member of Parliament and Minister of Health, J.A. Young.⁶

However, they faced continuing opposition from within the Hamilton Community Camp Association. A silly tiff between William Paul and Dr Spencer at the start of the first camp - over whether the boys should have sugar on their porridge - symbolised the gap between the comfortable middle-class disciplinarians of the Association and William Paul's and Hilda Ross's more charitable concern for those less well-off. William Paul wanted the boys to have their porridge sugared, but Dr Spencer opposed such indulgence.

There were more serious arguments at the committee meetings William Paul and Hilda Ross attended with other members of the Association. Some of them, particularly the YMCA representative, kept on carping about camps for poor children. William Paul and Hilda Ross were introducing class distinctions into their camp, he said; 'the poor should not be separated from the children of wealthier parents.'⁷ This was not what the Association had been set up for. William Paul always remembered the way 'Mrs Ross and myself were continually reminded by members of the committee that we were not there to sponsor poor children, but were there to pay off the mortgage on Camp Fergusson.... the opinion was freely expressed...that a poor children's camp committee should be a separate organisation from Camp Fergusson Finance Committee.'

William Paul and Hilda Ross went ahead and ran their poor children's camps at Camp Fergusson - so well that even Dr Spencer had to admit they were well conducted and a great success. Even so, at the next committee meeting early in 1928 the carping still continued. William Paul and Hilda Ross had had enough. They withdrew from the Hamilton Community Camp Association, vowing to establish their own group and organise holiday camps for poor children themselves, outside the established youth groups and without the heavy hand of Dr Spencer and his group of local worthies.

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William Paul and Hilda Ross held the inaugural meeting of their new group, which they called the Waikato Children's Camp League, in October 1928. They had already managed to win over some prominent

supporters, including several who had been involved in the Community Camp Association: J.A. Young (the Member of Parliament for Hamilton) agreed to become their president, and J.R. Fow (the mayor) and A.E. Manning (the Managing Director of the *Waikato Times*) to become Vice-Presidents. Of course these were honorary positions only; in line with William Paul's usual approach, the League's policies, finances and activities were firmly controlled by a small working committee with him as chairman and Hilda Ross as secretary-treasurer.

They were clear about their aim: to provide seaside holidays free for the children of poor families. But where? Initially they had expected to go on using Camp Fergusson, but it was soon made clear that they were not wanted there.⁸ So they looked for a new site - somewhere by the sea, well away from the old Camp Fergusson at Raglan, and preferably better and more attractive than that place had been.

A surveyor friend suggested Port Waikato, at the mouth of the Waikato River. There were beaches within the river bar and out on the open sea coast, and sand-hills and bush-covered hills behind. And there was good access - by the river. The port had once been a busy shipyard and a depot for military activities in the wars of the 1860s. It was quieter now, but Port Waikato was still an important transit point for coastal shipping calling in from the sea and shallow-draft river boats coming down the river. William Paul and Hilda Ross went to see the man who dominated this shipping business: Caesar Roose. He knew Port Waikato well. When they spoke to him about it as a site for a camp for poor children, Caesar Roose was very encouraging and arranged to take them there to see for themselves.

At Port Waikato William Paul, Hilda Ross and Caesar Roose met with several older settlers, who were also supportive and told them 'you can build your camp where you like.' William Paul, who had been primed by his surveyor friend, quickly selected the most suitable site, on a 50 acre block owned by Mr Edward Spargo beside a quiet country road near the coast.⁹ It was later described as 'a very happy choice - a long sheltered valley, bordered by a steep hillside crowded with luxuriant native bush, a strip of level grassy land in the foreground, with, along one border, a little stream flowing gently over a bed of sand and pebbles.'¹⁰ Mr Spargo agreed to allow William Paul and Hilda Ross free use of it for their camp.

With the site settled, work then began in earnest. Fundraising by William Paul's 'bonds' and Hilda Ross's 'Dandy Dozen' concerts raised more than twice as much as the previous year, and other help came in. The Hamilton Operatic Society donated £100. A friend in the Public Works Department offered to lend tents and cooking utensils. Caesar Roose undertook to provide free transport down the river to Port Waikato by his paddle-steamer *Manuwai*. The site at Port Waikato was prepared and a small corrugated-iron cookhouse was put up.¹¹

By December all was ready and applications were invited for children whose parents could not afford to give them a holiday to go to the new camp beside the sea. 'This year's summer camp', the publicity announced, 'will be held at Port Waikato'.¹²

The applications poured in. The previous year they had taken only 75 boys and then, separately, 75 girls to Camp Fergusson. This time they confidently decided to take 200, boys and girls together. Thus on 27 December William Paul and Hilda Ross, with Dr F.D. Pinfold as medical officer and 'several able lady assistants', saw the children safely on board the *Manuwai*, which set off to the cheers of the watching parents.¹³ With Hilda Ross at the ship's piano striking up a bright tune, the children's happy voices rang out across the water as the *Manuwai* swung around with the current, splashed away down the river and disappeared around the first bend.



Setting off on the *Manuwai* for Port Waikato camp!
(Waikato Museum of Art and History)

Within a month of returning from the camp they had drawn up plans for the first buildings - a dining hall and kitchen, and a storehouse - and called tenders to have them built.³ Their Waikato Children's Camp League was put on a more permanent footing too, being registered as an incorporated society. This enabled it to take legal ownership of the land at Port Waikato given by Mr Spargo. Then there was the matter of finance. There was still a healthy surplus from the first year's operations even after all the bills for the camp had been paid, and with their regular fundraising programmes they were confident of being able to finance the buildings.

The next camp in January 1930, with the new dining hall and kitchen, had fewer problems, though again there were several days of rain. Tents were not really satisfactory for all conditions. So they set out to complete the building programme and put the whole camp into permanent accommodation. The Waikato Commercial Travellers had offered to help raise funds for the League, and with their help sufficient money was raised to build two dormitories for girls and two for boys, designed to take a total of 200 children. Cabins were also provided for the organisers, cooks and other staff. By the end of 1930 the buildings were up and ready. The next camp in January 1931 was thus held under 'the most favourable conditions, the buildings being adequate and the appointments complete'.⁴

The Waikato Children's Camp League and its Port Waikato camp were certainly well established. William Paul and Hilda Ross had even gained vice-regal patronage for their enterprise. In December 1930 the Governor-General, Lord Bledisloe, consented to their request, saying that he had 'great sympathy with their undertaking' and that it would give him 'great pleasure' to become patron.

William Paul and Hilda Ross continued as the mainstays of the organisation, both in the work during the year fundraising, planning and organising, and at the camps. Others helped. Dr Pinfold had resigned from the League after the first camp, but Mrs Madoline Cobb of the St John's Ambulance Association took the role of 'ambulance officer' to care for the health of the children while they were in camp. She became one of the stalwarts of the League, and was quickly elected onto the committee. In fact for many years she, William Paul and Hilda Ross were the entire committee.

The camps were gradually extended from 10 days to 2 weeks, then to 3 weeks, with as many as 230 children. The number was later reduced. In 1937 there was an epidemic of poliomyelitis ('infantile paralysis') and there were fears about children in schools or camps catching the disease. The annual camp at Port Waikato was postponed, and then only 125 children were taken. Subsequently the number was kept at about this level, but more camps were held, with two or occasionally three camps in succession during the six weeks of the summer school holidays each year.

Donations of food and other stores kept the costs of the camp down, and most of the helpers worked voluntarily. William Paul, Hilda Ross and Madoline Cobb went every year, and involved their own families as well. In 1930 the young helpers, or 'prefects' as they were then called, included William Paul's son Blackwood and Hilda Ross's younger son Colin, and also Glenys Denz, one of the leaders of the Dandy Dozen - who subsequently married Hilda Ross's elder son Norman. There were some paid staff, such as Mrs Troup and her assistants who did the arduous and essential kitchen work. But in the early years the whole costs of a camp worked out at less than £1 per child per week.

In 1933 the League purchased from Mr Spargo a further 65 acres across the road from the camp site to make a farm. It would provide an ongoing income for the League and milk for the camps. They also planned to provide a farm cottage large enough to double as a 'youths hostel...to be placed at the disposal of organisations who desired to spend a holiday in the locality'.⁵

Even before the farm cottage was ready, William Paul had already invited the Hamilton YMCA to hold its summer camp on the property. Afterward the YMCA sang the praises of 'Camp Kahukura': 'A more delightful spot could not be found.... We know of no better equipped camp in New Zealand than this and we are very grateful to the Waikato Children's Camp League for the use of its wonderful camp site, and special



The leaders: Hilda Ross, barefoot, mucking in and helping; and William Paul, immaculately dressed, directing operations.
(South Auckland Education Board Collection)

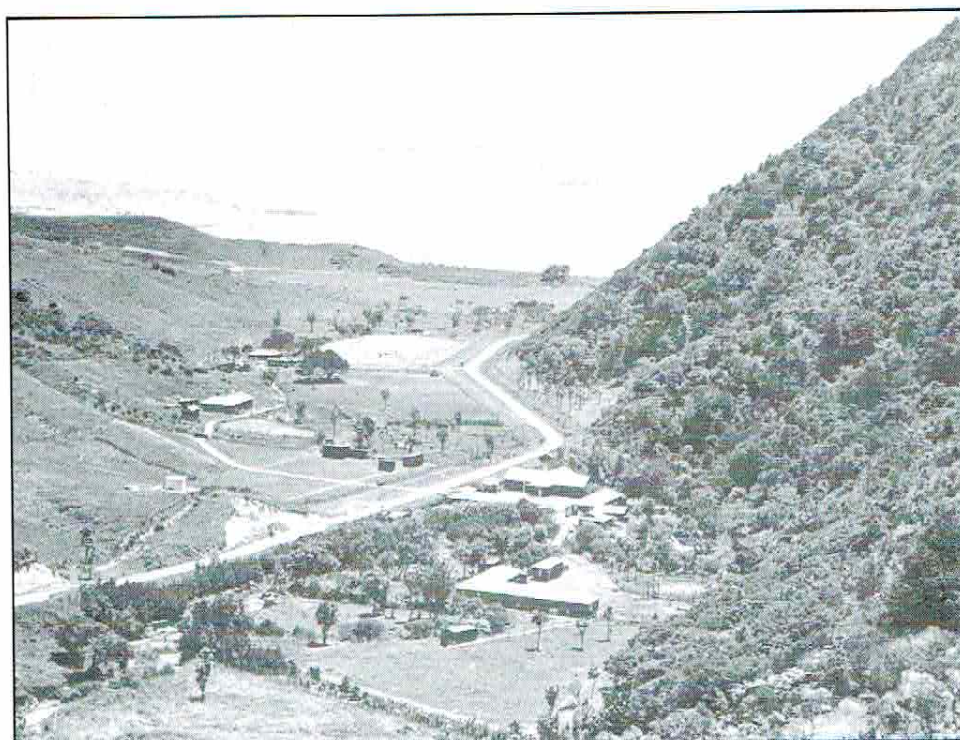
thanks are due to Mr W.H. Paul for his kindly assistance and advice in all arrangements for this year's camp.¹⁶

William Paul's assistance here had an ulterior motive. The Hamilton YMCA was now under new leaders who did not remember the quarrels of the past, but he did. Since the time when he and Hilda Ross had been pressured out of the Hamilton Community Camp Association and denied the use of its Camp Fergusson, that Association had faded and the camp had hardly been used. By 1933 it was only occasionally occupied, with a few families using it for Christmas camping holidays. Even the YMCA now rejected it as 'unsuitable'.

William Paul and Hilda Ross made use of the YMCA's rejection of Camp Fergusson and praise for Port Waikato in an audacious bid to take over the old camp. William Paul returned to the struggling Hamilton Community Camp Association, where he raised the suggestion that it should be wound up and its camp and assets transferred to the flourishing Waikato Children's Camp League, which could turn them to better use. Hilda Ross organised motions of support for the idea from other groups. But the older members of the Hamilton Community Camp Association roused themselves to oppose it. Dr Spencer, who had long since left Hamilton, wrote that 'The proposal would be amusing were it not so preposterous'.¹⁷ After a sharp controversy through the columns of the *Waikato Times*, the idea was dropped - or at least shelved for the meantime.

For this was the last gasp of the old Association. Its Camp Fergusson property was subsequently transferred to the Hamilton Borough Council (as had always been intended) but still it remained unused. Eventually the Council agreed that it should be passed over to the Waikato Children's Camp League. The transfer formalities were completed in 1938.

William Paul and Hilda Ross's triumph over their opponents in the Hamilton Community Camp Association was thus complete. While the Association's establishment figureheads had floundered and failed to achieve anything, William Paul and Hilda Ross's Waikato Children's Camp League had the Port Waikato Children's Camp firmly established, well funded and fully provided with all the permanent accommodation and facilities needed for successful camps. Their philosophy of children's camps - of giving poor children a holiday by the seaside - had gained wide public support, and they were successfully providing several hundred children each summer with a memorable stay at Camp Kahukura Aroha - Port Waikato Children's Camp. And it was all provided free for those who couldn't normally afford it. As their motto put it, *None may enter who can pay; none may pay who enter.*



Port Waikato Children's Camp, about 1936, with the building programme complete. Across the road to the left is the new camp farm, with the farm house and other buildings already completed as well.
(Waikato Museum of Art and History)

3: Port Waikato Camp in the 1930s

The children who went to those early camps at Port Waikato knew nothing of the organisational politics behind the scenes, but they certainly knew Mr Paul and Mrs Ross as the people in charge at the camp. Right from the beginning William Paul and Hilda Ross organised their camps to a set routine, and with rules strictly observed. Mr Paul was the camp commandant - a term that was used at the first camp and sometimes later. He was a rather stern figure, often shut away in his cabin busy with administrative matters. Mrs Ross was more a camp mother (though that term was not used then) - a firm disciplinarian, busy with all the practical chores, but a warmer, more approachable figure.

Each summer they announced the camp in the *Waikato Times*, inviting applications for children to go. The camps were for primary school children aged 7 to 14. And of course, as their publicity explained, 'the aim of the League is to take only those children to Camp whose parents cannot afford to give them a holiday themselves'. They asked for a reference signed by a mayor, clergyman, doctor, schoolmaster or postmaster certifying that this was the case.

Successful applicants were sent a list of the articles to bring to camp: 'Two blankets for each child, one pillow, towel, soap, brush and comb and other toilet articles that are necessary, bathing costume, old clothes, and old boots or shoes, sunhat and water-proof coat.' These were all to be packed in a sack or sugar-bag - no suitcases or baskets were allowed (because of the difficulty of storing them at camp). And the children were not to bring 'money, sweets, cakes or eatables'.¹

In the early years the trip to Port Waikato on Caesar Roose's paddle-steamer *Manuwai* was a notable part of going to camp. Mr Roose provided this transport free. But from 1937 William Paul and Hilda Ross began hiring buses instead for the trip, explaining that the journey down the river 'though interesting for an hour or two, proved long and tedious. Buses...cover the 80 miles from Hamilton in under three hours, as against the [river] journey of from eight to fourteen hours by steamer.'²

At the camp the children were looked after mainly by a group of young people, who were referred to as 'prefects' or 'aunties and uncles'. Ruth Dwen of Tuakau volunteered several times as a camp prefect in the 1930s:

We would all arrive at the wharf, unload our gear onto a cart then we would walk about a mile to the camp. I was a prefect there, and we looked after about 10 kids each.

A small sandy stream runs through the camp (its name is Maraetai Creek), there was no running water for many years, so to wash, the girls went to one part of the creek, and the boys went to another... There were mostly organised games, running races and such, as well as swimming, tramping, and activities outside the camp. All designed with the thought in mind of giving these youngsters the time of their lives.³

The prefects were given strict instructions:

No corporal punishment under any circumstances

All children must go to the stream to wash

Every child must wear a hat

When children are bathing or paddling, Prefects must always form an outer ring and must have their whistles

Rest Hour means the children must recline and read or sleep during the rest hour

On no account are candles or naked lights to be used⁴



Above: From 1937 the children went to Port Waikato by bus. They were instructed to bring their belongings in sugar-bags - there was no room for suitcases at camp. (Auckland Weekly News photo, Waikato Museum of Art and History)

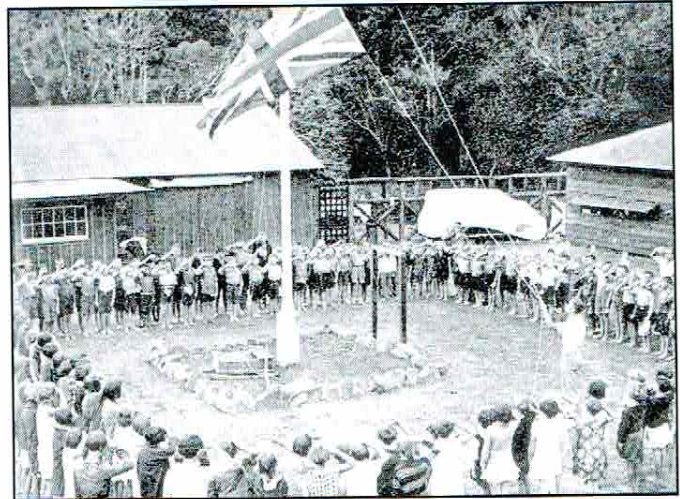
Below: Going in the bus was not as grand as the old *Manuwai*, but it was still exciting, and much quicker. (South Auckland Education Board collection)



The children had their strict instructions too. The boys must not cross the stream into the girls' dormitory area; and everyone had to keep to the paths within the camp area - no short-cuts across the grass.

The activities at camp in the 1930s followed an almost military routine:⁵

- 6.15 a.m. **PREFECTS RISE**
- 6.30 a.m. **CHILDREN RISE**
Personal hygiene under supervision of Prefect
Mattresses turned
Wash in creek - free running, and clear, pebble bottom
- 6.45 a.m. **DRINK OF MILK**
Mug of scalded milk
- 7.00 a.m. **FLAG SALUTE - LORD'S PRAYER**
- 7.10 a.m. **DRILL**
Physical Jerks
- 7.30 a.m. **BREAKFAST**
Oatmeal porridge with sugar cooked in it - none on tables.
Bread and butter. Grace always said
- 8.15 a.m. **TIDY DORMITORIES**
Fold up blankets
- 8.30 a.m. **DISPENSARY**
Sick Parade
- 9.00 a.m. **INSPECTION**
Each child standing by bunk
- 9.10 a.m. - **BEACH, WALKS ETC**
- 11.30 a.m. *Walk to beach or some place of interest. Programme organised by Aunts and Uncles the night before.*
- 11.30 a.m. **PREPARE FOR LUNCH**
- 12.00 noon **LUNCH**
Soup, bread and butter, jam, milk
- 12.30 - 2 p.m. **REST**
- 2.00 p.m. **BEACH WALKS ETC**
- 4.45 p.m. **PREPARE FOR TEA**
- 5.00 p.m. **TEA**
Dinner: Stews, potatoes, cabbage, swede, plum duff, rice or sago, milk
- 5.30 p.m. **FLAG DOWN**
- 6.00 p.m. **DISPENSARY**
- 6.00 p.m. **RECREATION OR CONCERT**
Sing song, items by children.
Mrs Ross played the piano.
- 8.00 p.m. **DRINK OF COCOA. THEN TO BED**
- 8.30 p.m. **LIGHTS OUT**



Above: Saluting the (British) flag, 1932. After rising at 6.30 a.m. and washing in the stream, the children, supervised by the older 'uncles' and 'aunties', assemble for the flag-raising ceremony before breakfast. (J.F. Loudon photo, Waikato Museum of Art and History)

Below: To the beat of the drum, the girls march into the dining hall for breakfast. The boys wait their turn marching on the spot. (Waikato Museum of Art and History)



Sometimes important visitors came to inspect the camp and the children would be lined up to welcome them. In the early 1930s the Hon J.A. Young, the Hamilton Member of Parliament and Waikato Children's Camp League President, visited almost every year. When he came in 1934 the children greeted him with 'the camp haka and "Haere-mai" traced in hydrangea flowers."⁶ At this time he was Minister of Health again after a spell in opposition, and he helped find more funding for the League. He also helped arrange a special visitor to the camp. It was a great day in January 1936 when the Governor-General

and his wife, Lord and Lady Galway, came. They admired all the facilities and listened to speeches in a picturesque clearing in the bush beside the camp.⁷

This peaceful area with its backdrop of native trees was subsequently made into an open air chapel. It was dedicated as a memorial to Mr Edward Spargo, the donor of the camp land (who had died in 1935), and to the early Port Waikato missionaries, Maunsell, Ashwell and Morgan, whose mission station had once been on the block adjoining the camp.

After the camp farm was established the couple employed to run it, Mr and Mrs Sanders, helped with the camp as well. In preparation for each camp Mr Paul would send straw for the Sanders to fill 200 palliasses for the children to sleep on, but there was never enough so they had to make it up with hay from the farm. During the camp Mr Sanders attended to the rubbish, helped with the dishes, and acted as general handyman. However, his first job for the day was to milk the cows to provide milk for the camp - and, most importantly, cream for Mr Paul's porridge. Mrs Sanders was expected to help Mrs Troup, the cook.

Their daughter was expected to join in the camp too, but as she recalled many years later, she had mixed feelings about it: 'While the camp was on we children had to live at the camp with the others and not have contact with our parents. We were expected to be Camp Children.' Many of the provisions for the camp were donated or bought as cheaply as possible, and she didn't think much of the food. The stew they had for dinner was 'nearly all fat.... But they made you eat it. No food was allowed to go back to the kitchen.'

But despite the minor discomforts there was plenty to do and fun to be had at Port Waikato. 'We all went out to the breakers and to the caves in the cliffs on the ocean beach. You had to be very careful with the tide coming in. There was the wreck of a sailing ship in the dunes. Part of the mast was still standing up....'⁸

Singing was a special part of the camp, thanks to Mrs Ross in particular. 'A singing Camp is a happy camp,' she always said; 'for singing and camping somehow seem to be synonymous.... There is nothing that builds up a spirit of camp loyalty as good camp singing.'⁹

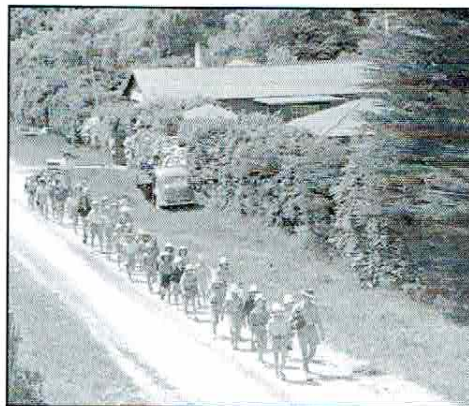
There were songs for all occasions. There was a special camp song (to the tune 'Marching Thro' Georgia.') as they marched in line to the next activity. And there were the happy hours in the evenings, when Mrs Ross sat at the piano and had everyone singing together. Then, when darkness was falling and it was almost time to sleep, she would lead into one of the old favourites:

Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low...

*Sleep, my child and peace attend thee
All through the night...*

*Good night to you all, and sweet be thy sleep,
May angels around you their silent watch keep*

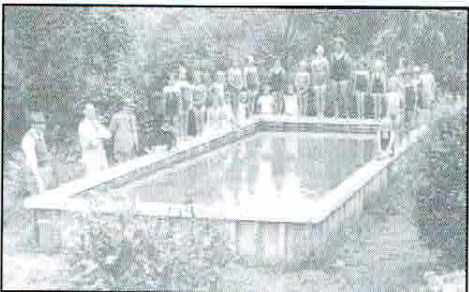
It was all part of the Port Waikato magic.



Setting off in orderly fashion for an afternoon walk.
(E.R. Booth photo, South Auckland Education Board collection)



Cricket was always a favourite pastime for the boys.
(E.R. Booth photo, South Auckland Education Board collection)



By 1937 the camp even had its own swimming pool. The girls (swimming was segregated) wait for a photograph before being given the word to jump in. Mr Paul, in his usual jacket and hat, also gets into the picture.
(Waikato Museum of Art and History)



'Just a song at twilight...' Hilda Ross was magic at the piano.
(South Auckland Education Board Collection)



4: 'Where Health and Happiness Meet'

In and Out of the Health Camp Movement

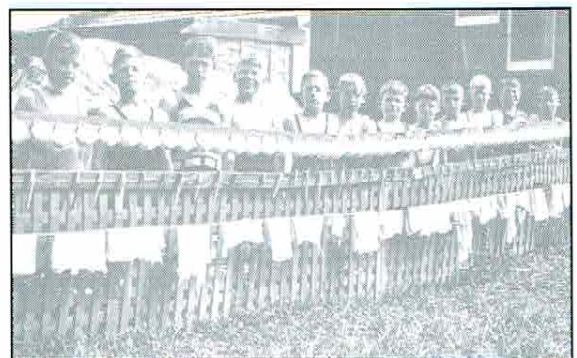
Port Waikato was by no means the only children's camp in the 1920s and 30s. There were groups all around the country setting up children's camps: the Community Sunshine Association in Auckland, the Sunshine League in Christchurch, the Methodist City Mission in Dunedin. And there were children's camps run by school doctors of the Health Department. All these organisations had slightly different approaches and philosophies, but they all agreed that a spell at a camp, with plenty of fresh air, sunshine, and good food, was of benefit to underprivileged, undernourished children, and therefore of benefit to the country.

The Health Department doctors called their camps 'health camps', and this term became loosely applied to all the children's camps. Gradually, with encouragement from the Health Department and the government, the various camps and camp groups were drawn together into a more organised health camp movement. Government funding helped draw them in. William Paul and Hilda Ross and their Waikato Children's Camp League began obtaining government grants from 1931. Then from 1933 they, along with other 'health camp' groups, received grants from Art Union (lottery) funds. Two years later they also began receiving a share of the funds collected from the sale of health stamps - postage stamps on which an extra penny surcharge on each stamp went 'For Health'.

The League and its Port Waikato Children's Camp were certainly regarded as part of the growing health camp movement. When the Health Department produced publicity material on health camps in 1933 it gave Port Waikato Children's Camp a prominent place.¹ As well it might - Port Waikato was the largest and best-established of all the children's camps. Most other groups were still using tents or borrowed accommodation for their camps.

However, while other groups were accepting assistance from Health Department staff to help run their camps, William Paul and Hilda Ross did not need this and did not want it either. They kept firmly in control of the Port Waikato camp. William Paul, Hilda Ross and the others in the Waikato Children's Camp League had the energy and commitment to run the camp themselves, and the determination to do it their way. They accepted the health camp grants, but these still made up a relatively small part of the League's income. By far the greater part came from their own activities, especially William Paul's annual fundraising 'bonds' sold to a list of regular donors, and a growing return from the operations of the dairy farm at Port Waikato.

William Paul and Hilda Ross continued to insist that they were providing a holiday camp for poor children, but they did also stress its health benefits. As the slogan on their fundraising bonds proclaimed, Port Waikato Children's Camp was 'Where Health Joins Hands With Happiness'.² And they did move some way toward the health camp model and adopted some of the practices of the health camps run by the Department's doctors. They allowed the Department's local



Massed toothbrush drill was a part of the health camp routine in the 1930s and 40s.
(Weekly News, 2 March 1938,
Waikato Museum of Art and History)

medical officers to recommend children in need of a camp. At the camp they stressed hygiene as part of the disciplined daily routine. After the first few years there was also more stress on good food. The new camp farm helped here: it provided enough fresh milk for the children to have their ration of nearly 2 pints a day. Hilda Ross and Madoline Cobb, the camp nurse, also adopted the health camp practice of weighing the children to check that they were gaining in weight and health. Publicity material for the camp stressed the weight gains the children made, with 'before' and 'after' photographs showing children who came to camp skinny and undernourished, and leaving looking fit and filled-out.

But despite this increased emphasis on health, the Health Department officials still tended to look down on Port Waikato and the other camps run by the voluntary groups as being of little health value. The longer-term camps run by the Department, where the children were under expert medical supervision by doctors and nurses, were the only 'True Health Camps', they thought.³ In public comments the Health Department used more diplomatic terminology, drawing the distinction between 'summer' camps run by local groups during the summer school holidays, and 'permanent' health camps run by the department over extended periods through the year.

In 1936 the Health Department moved to bring some organisation and control to the proliferating health camp movement, and invited delegates from all the groups involved to a meeting in Wellington. Hilda Ross attended for the Waikato Children's Camp League. She explained to the conference that the League did not even use the term 'health camp'. 'We have used the word "Holiday" Camp. Our camp is for poor children....at present the need in our district is for a poor children's holiday camp.' However, 'We hope in time we will become a Permanent Health Camp'.⁴ The stress was more on the permanence than the health camp aspect; the league's ultimate goal was the establishment of 'a permanent camp for children who would benefit from a sojourn at the seaside, living under ideal conditions, with fresh air, good food, regular hours and kindly discipline'.⁵

But the Health Department officials had their own agenda for the conference. They presented a plan they had drawn up for a federation of health camps, with national and regional councils. The proposal was that funding from health stamps, lottery grants etc. would go only to those groups that were part of the new federation. Some delegates expressed anxiety about aspects of the plan. Would the existing voluntary groups still have a voice and still retain control of their local camp?



Girls lined up to be weighed, 1933.

This health camp practice had been adopted at Port Waikato to demonstrate the benefits of the camp in building up malnourished children.

(F.J. Loudon photo, Auckland Weekly News, 18 January 1933, Waikato Museum of Art and History)

And given the emphasis placed on the 'permanent' health camps, what was the place of the 'summer' camps that many groups ran? Even so, despite their misgivings, the delegates went along with the Health Department's plan.

Following the conference there was another important development in building up the health camp movement. King George V had died earlier in the year and the government agreed that New Zealand's memorial to him would be in the form of Health Camps. There would be an appeal for donations to a Memorial Fund, which would be used to develop a chain of permanent health camps for children throughout the country. It was a popular choice: the King George V Memorial Appeal early in 1937 raised nearly £89,000, which the government then matched. Legislation passed by parliament in



The morning inspection:

Hilda Ross congratulates the girls on their tidy dormitory. (South Auckland Education Board Collection)

1938 formalised the King George V Memorial Fund and established a Board to administer and use it to establish, maintain or improve children's health camps.

William Paul immediately applied on behalf of the Waikato Children's Camp League for a grant of £3500 to improve the Port Waikato camp. But did Port Waikato Children's Camp qualify as a health camp eligible for funding? The Act defined a children's health camp as 'a permanent camp...used exclusively for the purposes of a children's health camp, whether it is used or occupied continuously or otherwise'.⁶ Under this rather circular definition, it seemed that Port Waikato Children's Camp did qualify.

The King George V Memorial Fund Board agreed, but was still unwilling to give grants to 'privately-owned' camps like Port Waikato. What if the Waikato Children's Camp League ceased running camps and the Port Waikato property was sold? Eventually, after much negotiation with William Paul, the Board agreed that the League could have the grant, but only on condition that if it ever ceased operating and was wound up, then its Port Waikato camp and other assets would go to the Board. The League was required to change its constitution to write this into its rules.

By the time all this was settled and the grant was finally approved late in 1939 New Zealand was at war and controls had been imposed on building activities. It was another year before work was allowed to go ahead. However, the tenders for the job were now higher under wartime conditions than had been allowed for earlier. William Paul had to go back to the King George V Memorial Fund Board for a further £900. He got the extra grant in return for handing over to the Board the old Camp Fergusson property at Raglan which the League had recently inherited. The Raglan land was of little use to the League - or to the King George V Memorial Fund Board, which sold it as soon as it could.

The upgrading work at Port Waikato then proceeded. The dormitories were lined, porches and verandahs added, toilet and laundry blocks built, and septic tanks installed. The League funded further work itself as well - the buildings were painted, the office and staff rooms enlarged, and paths laid.⁷

Camps at Port Waikato continued during the war years. In fact, since all the official permanent camps were out of action, having been requisitioned for war purposes, the summer camps like Port Waikato actually kept the health camp programme going until the permanent camps could be reopened. In 1945 William Paul and Hilda Ross even allowed Port Waikato to be used for a health camp for Auckland children, after the League had run its own regular camp for Waikato children during the summer school holidays.

The League and the other local voluntary groups also continued to be important in assisting the annual campaigns to sell health stamps and other fundraising activities. William Paul was an important fundraiser in

Hamilton. At the same time Hilda Ross was becoming an increasingly significant figure in her own right. She had won election to a series of public offices: the Waikato Hospital Board in 1941, then the Hamilton Borough Council in 1944. By 1945 she was deputy mayor. Then in May 1945 when the Member of Parliament for Hamilton died, Hilda Ross stood for the National Party in the by-election, and won. She was the sixth woman to be elected to parliament in New Zealand. Four years later when National became the government she was made Minister for the Welfare of Women and Children. This position was created to fulfil an election promise and initially had no responsibilities or power, but Hilda Ross soon persuaded the Prime Minister to give her some real work to do. Thus in 1950, among other responsibilities, Hilda Ross became Minister responsible for Health Camps.



'Spargo' boys' dormitory after the upgrading in 1940 - but the beds are still the stretchers donated by the Defence Department in 1930. The poster on the wall to the left reads *Cleanliness - The Safe Way To Health*. (Waikato Museum of Art and History)

But even with Hilda Ross as Minister, the trend continued towards centralisation of the health camp movement and towards permanent departmentally-run health camps rather than the locally-run summer camps. Policy was driven more by the departmental heads than the Minister. In 1953 Hilda Ross as Minister introduced new legislation into parliament to streamline the structure of the health camps administration (and in the process remove any role of the Minister in it). There were fears among some local health camp groups that under the new structure they would come even more under the control of the officials in Wellington, but Hilda Ross evidently did not see it that way. Indeed there was a clause inserted in the Act specifically providing for the King George V Health Camps Board to give support for summer camps - or, as the Act described them, camps 'with the object of providing holidays in pleasant surroundings for children lacking the normal opportunities for enjoying such holidays'.⁸



The Hon. Hilda Ross, Minister for the Welfare of Women and Children, Minister responsible for Health Camps, 1955

However, even before the new Act officially came into force the controls on Port Waikato and the other remaining summer camps were tightened considerably. At the local level, rather than streamlining the system, an increasingly bureaucratic set of councils, committees and procedures were brought in.

Local 'district executives' reporting to the regional health camp council were to be set up, to administer and organise local health camp activities and the health stamp campaign. In Hamilton, William Paul formed a nominal Waikato District Executive to satisfy this requirement, comprising himself as chairman and Miss Florence Allen, his Winter Show Association secretary who already did much of the secretarial work for League and Port Waikato camp business.

The District Executives were to obtain the approval of their regional Council and the national Board before any summer health camp was held. And money raised locally by the District Executive through the health stamp campaigns or otherwise was to be remitted to Wellington. However, in return a 'bed subsidy' of £3 per week would be paid for each child at any approved summer health camp. This was a little less than the Board-controlled permanent health camps got, but it was quite generous for an efficient operation like Port Waikato camp.

The new requirements caused continual friction between William Paul as chairman of the Waikato District Executive and the regional Council in Auckland that he was supposed to report to. William Paul was not accustomed to taking orders, and he continued to run things his way, ignoring instructions from Auckland or Wellington.

William Paul was certainly an effective organiser and the summer camps at Port Waikato were very successful and efficiently run. The large numbers of children catered for at Port Waikato compared to any other summer camp (and even compared to the official permanent health camps) meant that the amount it received under the £3 a week per child bed subsidy made a noticeably large item on the Health Camp Board's accounts - especially when the Board was struggling to finance the development of its permanent health camps. Questions began to be asked about the size of the subsidy for Port Waikato Camp.⁹ But despite the irritations between William Paul and the Health Camps hierarchy, for some time they managed to rub along. Perhaps it was Hilda Ross who was in a position to exercise a moderating influence.

By this time, after nearly 30 years of annual summer camps at Port Waikato, Hilda Ross and William Paul were taking less part in the direct running of the camp. They had always hired cooks for the camp, and now gradually extended the paid staff. And since Madoline Cobb could no longer come to the camp they began accepting a nurse/matron from the Department of Health. Even so, William Paul and Hilda Ross each usually spent some time at camp each year. Even in January 1956 when Hilda Ross was honoured with knighthood and became Dame Hilda, she still went to Port Waikato to spend a fortnight helping with the chores at the camp.

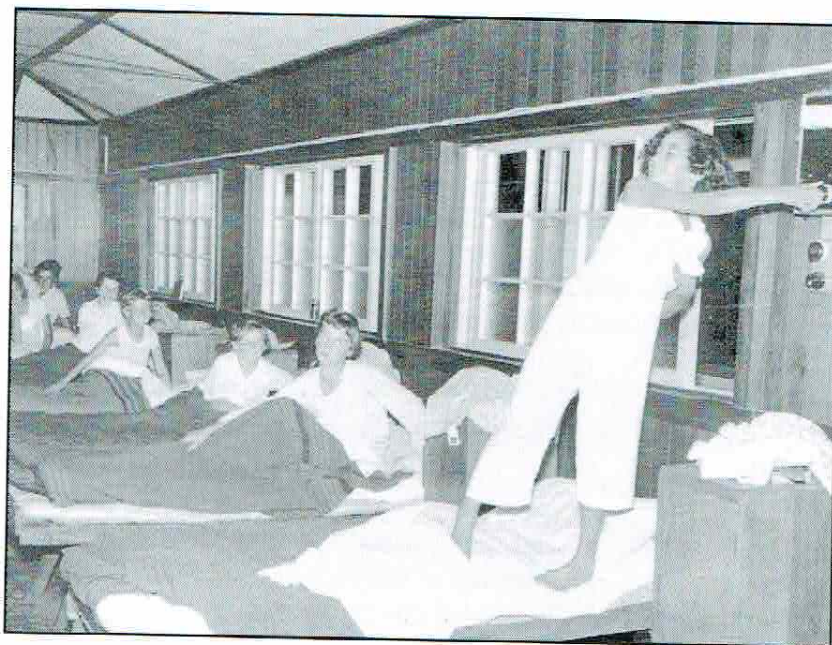
At the election of November 1957 the National government was defeated and Dame Hilda's position as Minister came to an end. Any influence she had with the Health Camp authorities was now much diminished. After that summer's camp at Port Waikato, the Auckland Council of the health camps movement again queried the size of the bed subsidy for it. And this time, before paying out the full amount of the subsidy, the

Council demanded that William Paul provide explanations for particular items of spending, and show 'supporting vouchers for the expenses incurred in running the Summer Camp'.¹⁰

For William Paul this was the last straw. He fired off a furious letter and refused to have anything more to do with the health camp authorities. He and his Winter Show secretary, the long-suffering Miss Allen, would no longer act for them as their Waikato executive committee, or assist with the sale of health stamps.¹¹

The Auckland Council tried to carry on the Waikato health camps operation without him. It appointed a new Waikato Executive and even obtained approval from the Board in Wellington for a summer camp to be held at Port Waikato as usual the next year. But William Paul was adamant that could not happen. He would have nothing more to do with the health camp people, and they would have nothing more to do with the Port Waikato Camp, which was still owned and controlled by his Waikato Children's Camp League. William Paul would not even speak to them. 'When they refused to pay us the money which was due, that was the end of it'.¹²

So there were no more summer health camps at the Port Waikato Children's Camp, or holiday camps either. Instead, a whole new kind of camp emerged. The Port Waikato Children's Camp was reborn in a new guise.



*'I have the power' - lights out in 'Ashwell' girls' dormitory when the camp first gained electric power in 1950.
(South Auckland Education Board Collection)*

From Summer Health Camp to School Camp

Well before the final rift with the health camps authorities, William Paul and Hilda Ross had been looking for possible successors to take over the running of Port Waikato Children's Camp and the supporting Waikato Children's Camp League. 'The time will soon come when we will have to pass the work on to the younger generation,' they told supporters of the League in 1952. However, people willing and able to take it on were hard to find. For a few years a younger couple, Mr and Mrs Arthur, took charge of the summer camps at Port Waikato. But then in 1954 there was a tragedy when a young boy at the camp drowned.¹ The following year the Arthurs and the Health Department nurse/matron from that camp all declined to go again. William Paul could find no-one else in time and had to cancel the camp for that year.

Later in 1955 William Paul was approached for the use of the camp for a new purpose. A specialist teacher in physical education, John Marshall, came to ask whether Port Waikato Children's Camp might be available for educational purposes. He wanted to take classes of primary school children on what he called 'school camps'. The classes would go away from their usual classroom to camp together, making use of the local surroundings for their learning, and gaining all the benefits of camp life in the outdoors.

In 1955 this was a very new idea in New Zealand, although 'school camps' or 'camp schools' had been established in Britain and other countries for many years. John Marshall had seen school camps in Britain when he stayed on there after war service, and he came back to New Zealand enthused about the idea. It also fitted with the new direction of the primary school curriculum, toward learning by direct experience. The new curriculum encouraged teachers to take Nature Study classes outdoors for direct observation, and Social Studies classes were to include 'Practice in social living.... to give children practical experience in the "give and take" of living together'. One of the suggested ways this could be done was by going on a 'camping school-journey'.² A few schools had tried unofficial camping trips and the Department of Education had now given approval for school days to be used for camping purposes. Thus when John Marshall started work in Hamilton as Senior Organiser for Physical Education for the newly established education authority for the Waikato region - which in those days was called the 'South Auckland Education Board' - he decided to try organising school camps. The Port Waikato Children's Camp seemed a likely place: although it was normally used for health camps in summer it was empty during term time. John Marshall went to ask Mr Paul if he could use it.

However, William Paul, the old autocrat, turned him down flat. No - he could not use the Port Waikato Children's Camp.

John Marshall found other specialist teachers and inspectors of schools who were also interested in the idea and they set up a committee to discuss how school camps could be started in the South Auckland Education Board area. They considered several possible camp sites but Port Waikato still seemed one of the best. John Marshall had still been unable to move Mr Paul on the matter, but another member of the committee said he would try. Ralph Birdsall, a specialist Instructor in Agriculture, was a more senior man, and he was also well-known to William Paul as a contributor to the Hamilton Winter Show which the latter still managed.

At the next meeting of the school camp committee he reported what happened: 'Mr Paul... would be delighted to give us the use of this Health Camp'.³

With their first camp site secured, the committee publicised the idea of school camps among schools and headmasters, and gained the approval of the Education Board to proceed. The committee was formally constituted as the South Auckland Education Board School Camps Committee, with Ralph Birdsall as chairman and John Marshall as secretary. They began planning for the first school camps at Port Waikato during the last term of 1956. Enough schools were keen to be involved that they actually had a draw for places on the first list of camps.

Thus in November-December 1956 Fairfield School, followed by Hillcrest, Forest Lake and Hamilton East Primary Schools, and Maeroa Intermediate each spent 6-7 days at Port Waikato. In January there was the regular summer health camp but then in the first term of 1957 six more school camps went to Port Waikato. Altogether 549 children of standard four, form one or form two went in that first school camp season of 1956-57. The camps went off very well - 'marvellously well', according to



Hillcrest School sets off for the first school camp at Port Waikato, November 1956.
(R. Cates & E. Jercovich photo,
South Auckland Education Board)

Barry Cowley, who took the second camp with Hillcrest School. Port Waikato was judged 'an ideal spot... we should endeavour to continue using it.'

Everyone was very enthusiastic about school camps. 'Taking school into the open air in a novel experiment at Port Waikato has, according to the organisers and the participants, been an unqualified success', reported the *Waikato Times*. Given the previous uses of the Port Waikato Camp it was perhaps not surprising that newspaper reports showed some confusion about the purposes of a school camp. John Marshall was irritated by references to 'this scheme of camp holidays in school time.'⁴ The camps were fun but they were definitely not holidays.

In May 1957 William Paul announced his intention to retire from running the Port Waikato camp. He was 78 and felt that 'the time had arrived when he had to give up his lifetime hobby.... all the original members of the League were, like himself, not in a position to carry on the actual administrative work of the camp any longer.' Dame Hilda Ross at 73 was still a busy cabinet minister, and had been less involved recently in League and camp affairs.

William Paul was working to put the finishing touches on the camp. 'I am spending a great deal of money to get things in good order. We are putting in a new Esse cooking stove and also water heater, and am hoping to get all our paths redressed with bitumen, and a general clean up.'⁵ He wanted to have it in the best possible shape for someone else to take over from him 'when it was decided which was the most appropriate organisation to conduct the camp'. He would be setting certain conditions. 'There would be stipulations governing the use of the camp to see that



School camp was still school -
a study period in the dining room.
(Waikato Museum of Art and History)

Waikato children enjoyed the benefits for as long as possible.... It is a great heartbreak to have to give up a hobby that has given so much pleasure and health to so many Waikato children,' he concluded. 'I can only hope that the wonderful facilities will be appreciated and the good work continued.'⁶

William Paul did not specify which organisation he had in mind to carry on the work and operate the camp. But it was evidently not the school campers. Just at this time, as they were celebrating the success of their first season, William Paul told them they could not use Port Waikato any longer. He was not satisfied with the way the school camps had been run. They had transgressed his rules in some way - perhaps there had been too much interaction between the girls and boys for his liking - so further access was denied.⁷ The Education Board School Camps Committee had to look elsewhere to continue their programme of school camps. For the next season starting in the last term of 1957 they arranged to use a smaller camp at Waihi Beach.

William Paul, despite his announcement about retiring, went on to organise the usual summer health camp at Port Waikato for 1957-58. But after that camp he fell out with the health camp authorities. There would be no more health camps at Port Waikato.

The rift with the health camp authorities made it even more important to William Paul to find successors to take over his and Dame Hilda's roles - not just in organising camps but, more importantly, in taking their places in the Waikato Children's Camp League. He did not want the League to fold up - because if it did, then under the rule change forced on it back in 1939, Port Waikato Children's Camp would become the property of the Health Camps Board. William Paul was determined not to let that happen.

With no other alternative in sight, William Paul now turned back to the Education Board and its School Camps Committee. He offered them the camp but he also wanted members of the committee to take positions in the League to keep that going as well, to avoid the camp falling into the hands of the Health Camps Board. The School Camps Committee and the Education Board balked at this. It seemed a rather irregular way to proceed. It also seemed to be a legal minefield, as the Health Camps Board was quite insistent that it had a claim to the camp and William Paul had no right to dispose of it.

However, in the meantime, while the issue of control and ownership of the Port Waikato camp was being settled, William Paul did agree to let the School Camps Committee use it for their school camps again. It was not being used for anything else. So in the last term of 1958 school camps returned to Port Waikato. They soon became an established and popular part of school life in the Waikato region, although the organisers were initially nervous about keeping onside with Mr Paul. And while the question of the control and ownership of Port Waikato camp remained unresolved they could do little about improvements or major maintenance.

William Paul went on trying to find a way to pass on the camp to someone other than the Health Camps Board.

But he was old and unwell, and carrying the burden on his own as Dame Hilda was no longer able to help. In February 1959 he even wrote to the Prime Minister about it, commenting that 'Dame Hilda is seriously ill at the moment and we frequently meet but never discuss Camp matters, and when we do, things are not very happy. However I am not doing anything for the present more than letting the Education authorities use the Camp.'⁸ Dame Hilda Ross died a month later, on 6 March 1959. At her funeral in Hamilton people came out in their thousands to honour this down-to-earth woman who had spent her life in working for others. As she had said when she received the honour of Dame of the British Empire, 'the only thing worth while in life is giving service'.⁹

The impasse over control and ownership of Port Waikato camp continued for several years. William Paul kept trying to find some other group willing and able to take over the camp and continue the League. Various Hamilton groups were suggested, and even the national YMCA. But nothing could be worked out.

Eventually in 1962, with William Paul now seriously ill, his son Blackwood stepped in to try to help sort it out. By this time the Waikato Children's Camp League too was only precariously surviving. A meeting had to be called to elect Blackwood Paul and another new member onto the committee just to keep it alive. William Paul was too ill to attend - Madoline Cobb, the original camp nurse, was now the only one left of the old members.

Blackwood Paul had hardly been involved with the Port Waikato camp since he had gone there as a young 'prefect' in the 1930s, but he now moved decisively to find a way through the impasse. He was impressed by the present school camps at Port Waikato and felt that the best outcome would be for them to continue. He thus negotiated for the Department of Education to take over the camp, if not as owner then by a long-term lease arrangement.

He soon brought news to his father that 'satisfactory arrangements have been made for the Education Department to take over the Waikato Children's Camp property.' William Paul 'received this news with great pleasure... Indeed he...promised to help in any way he can with future arrangements for the camp, including serving on any committee that may be set up!'¹⁰ William Paul - a willing worker to the end - died a few days later, on 9 June 1962. He had won respect rather than affection, but he had made things happen. Port Waikato Children's Camp was just one of the causes he had devoted his life to.

However, Blackwood Paul's good news had been premature. The fate of the Port Waikato Camp was not yet settled. The Education Department was still unwilling to proceed without the agreement of the Health Camps Board, which insisted it had a legal claim to ownership of the camp. The Health Camps Board argued that the Port Waikato property should have come under its control years ago, but for William Paul's stubbornness. There were even suggestions that the Education Department should now pay the Health Camps Board £10,000 for the camp.

Blackwood Paul held firm, and eventually the Health Camps Board conceded that using Port Waikato for school camps was 'a most worthy objective', and agreed to drop its objections to the Education Department leasing the camp - provided that the ownership question was settled by the League winding up and transferring the property to the Health Camps Board as its rules required.¹¹

And so, from 1 January 1963, Port Waikato Children's Camp was leased to the Education Department for a term of fifteen years 'for the purpose of fostering the educational, physical and social development of children of the South Auckland district'.

John Marshall was jubilant. 'The lease by the Department of Education of the Port Waikato Camp has ushered in a new era in school camping, and can be taken as official recognition of the efforts and enthusiasm of the Board, Headmasters, class teachers and the specialist services for their belief in the worthwhile benefits occurring from this type of educational programme.' In the latest camping season, 1962-63, Port Waikato camp had been used for school camps for a total of 247 days, with 1055 children, 90 training college students and 45 teachers, plus 89 camp mothers and 2 camp fathers there to help. There were concerns, however, about the inadequacy of funding for maintenance and development of the camp.

In December 1963 Blackwood Paul moved to carry out his part of the agreement and wind up the Waikato Children's Camp League. In order to get a quorum for the final League meeting he had to find two more members. John Marshall and Barry Cowley from the Education Board School Camps Committee agreed to join the League committee for the occasion to make up the numbers. John Marshall even took the role of Secretary-Treasurer to succeed Miss Allen, who had recently died. They met briefly on Christmas Eve, passed a resolution to have a bronze plaque erected at the camp in memory of William Paul and Hilda Ross, and then passed the final motion to wind up the League.

After 35 years William Paul and Hilda Ross's Waikato Children's Camp League thus came to an end. But the Port Waikato Children's Camp continued to flourish as the main school camp facility for the Waikato region of the South Auckland Education Board, and a model for school camps throughout New Zealand.

6: School Camp in the 1960s

School camps were a little different from the holiday camps or health camps of earlier days at Port Waikato. They were fun but they were not holidays. And the health nurse's scales had gone! As a newspaper report of one of the early school camps explained, 'to dispel a few illusions: The Port Waikato Children's Camp is healthy, but it is not a health camp, nor is it a holiday camp. It is not a camp for undernourished, underprivileged, or unhealthy children. It is not run on charity, as it was in bygone days.'

The last point was not entirely true. The South Auckland Education Board's School Camps Committee ran Port Waikato Camp on the proverbial shoestring and relied on the goodwill of the Physical Education and Nature Study Advisers who mainly led the camps, and the teachers and the parents (the 'camp mothers') who helped.

Physical Education Advisers such as Barry Cowley, Russell Cates and Trevor Wallbank; and Nature Study Advisers such as Colin Walker, Pat Devlin and John Mathieson really made the school camps work. Led and inspired by John Marshall and Ralph Birdsall, they not only gave their time well beyond normal working hours, but also provided their own transport, food, and gear. The Department of Education had no policy on school camps, and had no camps of its own, but - Catch 22 - would not pay staff any expenses or field allowances unless the camp was at a facility owned or leased by the Department. It was many years before this was sorted out. Even so, the advisers were very enthusiastic about school camps. As Russell Cates put it, 'In those days I considered school camping the highlight of my working life.'

At the beginning in 1956 Ralph Birdsall, the chairman of the School Camps Committee, assigned one of his young Nature Study Advisers in Hamilton to be 'Camp Commandant' at Port Waikato for its first term of operation as a School Camp. Colin Walker has vivid memories of how it went:

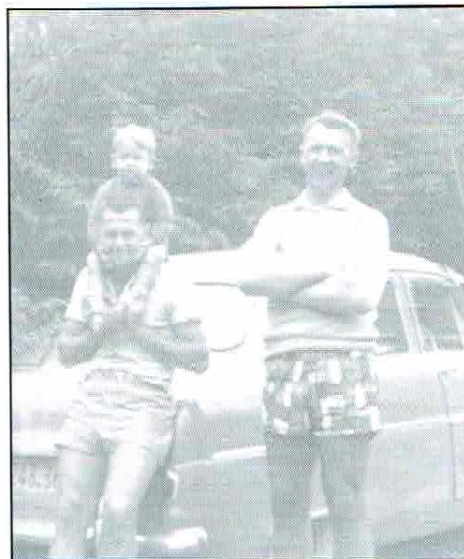
I was not really asked to go to camp - it was expected of me! I was happy to do so. It would be one long glorious field trip, I thought, so I packed up my sleeping bag and few possessions to spend the third term at Port Waikato. Fortunately I had recently left the Army Compulsory Military Training camp so had a good supply of everything from boots and gaiters to shirts and shorts!

I remember a quick couple of days' orientation with Phys Edders and some teachers who were to come to camp during that first third term. We walked and explored every track, sand dune, and bush area, hesitating only at a cave exploration... The only message I was really given was "This is a trial - it has to work, it must be successful!" And that was it!

Everyone else went back to Hamilton and I settled into the hut. Within hours the first bus load of Form 2's from Fairfield School arrived, complete with Camp Mothers (a.k.a. cooks) and mountains of food. Then what was to become the norm of settling in: choosing bunks, showing how the stoves worked, where the cooler was, where to turn the water on and off, the before dinner get-together where the camp rules were firmly read out. Not discussed - read out and accepted! Then a singsong and what was to become normal - grace was said before dinner. Following this a briefing for the next day, what to wear, where we were going, what to take, leave, and always reinforcement about keeping together, buddying, taking care of self and others and being responsible. It worked very well throughout that long term of 14-15 weeks.

As 'Commandant' one of my biggest responsibilities was to get lights out on time and maintain law and order at nights - firmly discouraging midnight feasts, or leaving the dorms.

One night all was settled when about 3 a.m. a violent storm struck, with thunder, lightning and rain. What should I do - check the creek? Stay put? Then a camp mum knocked on my door. The girls in their dorm across the bridge were screaming, rushing around tripping in the dark, and quite hysterical. Could I help? I was not trained for this but decided with camp mum we had to take control. With her I walked into



Physical Education Advisers Trevor Wallbank (with son Michael) and Barry Cowley. As the advisers spent up to three months of the year at Port Waikato Camp, they took their families with them. As well as supervising the school camps they also did much maintenance work at the camp. c 1961 (Trevor Wallbank)



In the early years of school camps in the 1950s the boys still went with the hand-cart each day to collect the milk straight from the camp farm.

(R. Cates & E Jercovich photo, Education November 1957)

the dark dorm over and around strewn sleeping bags, and sobbing screaming girls. I never knew how loud my voice could be! I just shouted out to my limit. What I yelled I do not remember but it was 100% effective! There was sudden silence from the girls, miraculously the lights turned on and camp mum and I just quietly talked the girls back to their bunks and made soothing sounds to the sobbing ones. Half an hour later a cuppa in the cookhouse with other adults and a very quiet camp. Interestingly enough, I did look in the boys dorm - it was the same as usual: untidy and smelly - and the noise from the snoring!

There wasn't much sleep for the Commandant. It was his job to get up at 4.00 a.m. to light the fire under 'the old black monster of a stove' so that it would be hot in time for the camp mothers to make toast on it and cook breakfast. (It was years before electric ovens were eventually installed and he could have an extra hour in bed.) Then at 6.45 a.m.:

Each morning I rang the get up bell and found ways of getting everyone on their feet without actually going into the girls' dorm. Every class had groups for duties.... I supervised this rigidly, as I did the dormitory inspections after breakfast (that army training was very useful!) The trick was to award points to the girls and boys dorms daily that were different yet arrange a tie at the end of the week!

Through the days I carried the first aid kit, led the way over dunes, up the hills and into the bush, did the head counts, told the history and taught the Nature Study.³

A standard programme of activities for school camps at Port Waikato was soon developed. In 1964, after school camps at Port Waikato had been going for eight years, Physical Education Adviser Barry Cowley described the routine:

An average intake is about 80 children organised into six groups. After six days' work, half of the children are occupied away from the camp proper on all-day hikes, overnight camps or on coastal treks lasting up to three days. While "at home" [at Port Waikato camp] a typical daily round might be:

6.45 a.m.	Wake, wash, clean and tidy dormitories.
7.15 a.m.	Dormitory inspection
7.30 a.m.	Breakfast, followed by camp chores
9.00 a.m. to 12 a.m.	Instruction period: Group I. Map and compass; Group II. Seashore study (all day); Group III. Campfire cooking; Group IV. Roping techniques; Group V. Tent pitching; Group VI. Bald Spur climb.
12.30 p.m.	Lunch, followed by chores.
2 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.	Instruction period: Groups rotate activities similar to those of the morning instruction period.
5.00 p.m.	Recreation
6.00 p.m.	Tea, followed by chores
7.00 p.m.	Entertainments.
8.30 p.m.	Bed.



'Watch out Sir - it might get you!' Science Adviser Pat Devlin takes a nature study class on sea shore life. (South Auckland Education Board collection)



Washing was still in the stream in the 1950s. (South Auckland Education Board collection)

Clearly, school camps in the 1960s were less regimented than the holiday and health camps of the past, although the children were expected to give more help in the chores of running the camp. They prepared food, set tables, washed up, swept paths and cleaned toilets. As one group commented as they set to work peeling and scraping a sugar-bag of potatoes, half a sugar-bag of carrots, a case of apples and a dozen cabbages, 'If only Mum could see us now!'⁴

The programme for the rest of the day was designed for instruction as well as enjoyment, with a range of activities. One of the highlights was always the camp-out, when the children carried their own gear and cooked their own meals. In preparation for this there were preliminary lessons in camp-craft: how to pitch a tent, light a fire, and cook a meal over it.

Then, when the day came, the group would set off with their teachers for the distant campsite. Carrying everything on their own backs was hard work, but the satisfaction of getting there and camping out under the stars was immense. As one boy told his teacher, with perspiration pouring down his face as they tramped back after their overnight camp. 'Gee Sir, I never knew I could work so hard and really enjoy it.'⁵

Other outdoor activities included day hikes, learning how to use map and compass, the confidence course, and 'rope work' - working up to another dramatic high point of the camp programme: abseiling down the cliff.

Other activities made use of what the camp and Port Waikato had to offer for various aspects of the school curriculum: nature study lessons in the bush, the sea-shore, the sand-hills, the stream or other habitats; social studies looking at the local Maori and Pakeha history; art and craft using local materials.⁶ There were outdoor sports and other special Port Waikato activities and pastimes, such as swimming at Maraetai Bay, or fishing from the wharf.

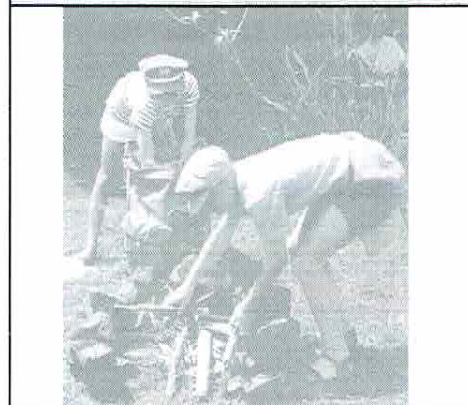
Then there were the special times in the evenings: round the fire on the camp-out, or gathered in the hall at the camp for concerts and entertainments. There were songs, games, stories, and concert items. The shadow play (with a light behind a sheet) of a comic 'operation', with knives and saws and much drawing out of strings of sausages and other innards was always a favourite. Children showed unsuspected talents in the concert, which was usually held in the hall on the last night of camp. Trevor Wallbank, who led camps for many years, tells the story of how surprised one Camp Mother was 'when her up till then rather timid son actually appeared on stage in a solo item entitled "Superman":

"I am Superman who wants to see my muscles?" (flexes minute biceps).

"Who wants to see my X ray vision?" (peers out into the audience).

"Who wants to see me fly?" (unbuttons front of trousers, as he exits stage right - and embarrassed mother exits hall by back door!!).

Singing was still a feature of camp life, with some new favourites such as the Port Waikato version of 'The Quartermaster's Store', or the grace sung before meals. Some of



1: Helping with the chores was a part of the routine at school camp.

2: Campcraft: learning how to pitch a tent.

3: Learning to set a camp-fire.

4: The school camp programme incorporated a range of outdoor activities, including the confidence course.

(South Auckland Education Board collection)

Hilda Ross's old favourites were still sung too, including the 'Goodnight' round, sung after supper 'as a quietener...to settle the children for the night':

*Goodnight to you all and sweet be your sleep,
May angels around you their silent watch keep...*

Altogether, school camp at Port Waikato was a great experience and a real adventure. The children went home full of stories of fun and excitement. One girl told how she had found an enormous weta: 'I saw a hole in a ti-tree... I put my finger in the hole and I was bitten. When I pulled my finger back, the weta was on the end of it.'⁷ Perhaps it is no surprise that the highlight of camp for one 11 year old boy was that 'We only had one bath.'⁸

Teachers and parents often commented on the way the children got on together and developed socially at camp. Dudley Wills, the national Superintendent of Physical Education, argued strongly for school camps on this basis. He saw the school camp as a way of fostering cooperation rather than competition. 'Not only is there an ideal learning climate, but the whole structure of camp life depends upon the close cooperation of campers in work, duties, studies, and recreation.'⁹

When Barry Cowley summed up the benefits after the first eight years of school camps at Port Waikato, he also stressed how the children grew and developed in leadership, tolerance, and initiative. They tackled the ropes of the confidence course and the steep ridges of the tramping trip with courage. They developed a greater sense of responsibility. As Barry Cowley commented, 'the daily inspection has been retained as a camp institution as it is the only time in the camp session that a child answers for anything as an individual. There is no group refuge or security against a poorly made bed or an untidy locker.' He noted too the children's satisfaction at physical challenges successfully surmounted - and how afterwards 'appetites seem huge and sleep is deep beyond measure.'

'Talk to any of the six thousand odd who have now passed through the gates - it is soon apparent that...in an undefinable way, the Port Waikato experience has worked its own special magic.'¹⁰

As Barry Cowley summed it up, *Camping is caught, not taught.*



Eels from the Maraetai stream could provide a tasty camp meal.
(South Auckland Education Board collection)

7: Ownership and Control of Port Waikato Camp

Another Chapter in the Long Saga

Port Waikato quickly became regarded as a great place for school camps and even a model for school camps for New Zealand. As Ralph Birdsall commented in one of his chairman's reports to the School Camps Committee, 'though Port Waikato is a considerable distance from the centre of the Board's area, no other site we have seen has the appeal and utility of this area. It has its history, its geography and topography; nature study abounds ashore, along the shore line and in the rock pools; there is opportunity for bush lore and tramping, with safe swimming available at all states of the tide.'¹ In the South Auckland Education Board's region - from Waikato to the Bay of Plenty - various other sites were tried for school camps, but Port Waikato was the most used and the most successful. Indeed, with the availability of Port Waikato and the enthusiasm of John Marshall, Ralph Birdsall and their Physical Education and Nature Study Advisers, school camping became a regular event for many local schools. A national School Camps Survey in 1968 showed that the South Auckland Education Board's region was by far the greatest user of school camps.

School camps were becoming part of a new, wider notion of 'Outdoor Education' and accordingly Port Waikato Camp began being referred to as the Port Waikato Outdoor Education Centre. It was becoming increasingly popular and the demand was such that school camps even began being held there in the winter term. In 1968 the Department of Education went so far as to suggest that school camps could be regarded as 'an integral part of the education system'.² However, this was not backed up by any increase in funding. The organisation and maintenance of the Port Waikato Camp was still a shoestring operation. The School Camps Committee kept reiterating that the camp was ageing and urgent maintenance was required 'to help preserve this valuable and deteriorating asset.'

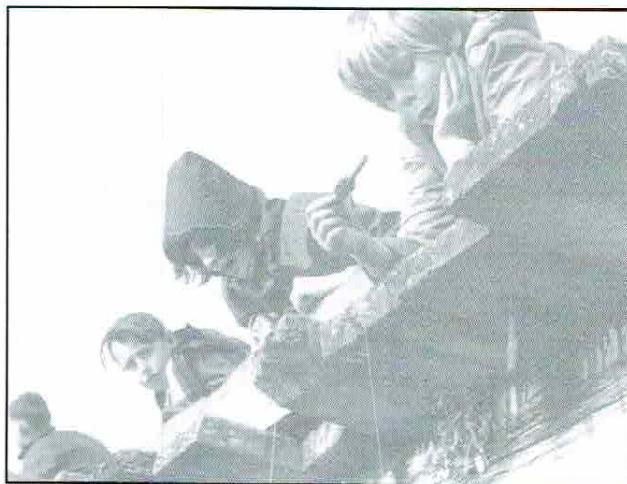
Anxiety about the future of the Port Waikato Camp was increased when the question of its ownership came up again. John Marshall, who still acted as executive officer for school camps on the School Camps Committee, inadvertently set this off in 1970 when he passed a query about the camp property to the Health Camps Board. As far as he knew, ownership of the Camp had been transferred to the Health Camps Board after the final meeting of the Waikato Children's Camp League which he had attended in December 1963. But it turned out that the League's solicitors had never completed the transfer - and the Health Camps Board had evidently forgotten about Port Waikato Camp too, until now reminded of it.

The Health Camps Board pressed for the transfer of ownership to now be completed - and John Marshall, as the only known member of the Waikato Children's Camp League, was asked to sign the papers for this to be done. He was reluctant, but eventually signed the authorisation.

But that was not the end of the matter. No-one had noticed that a few months earlier the Registrar of Incorporated Societies, after hearing nothing from the League for many years, had finally struck it off the list of Incorporated Societies. This meant that League no longer legally existed, and its property - i.e. the Port Waikato Camp - was legally regarded as being without



A nature study class heads up 'Devil's Dash' to study the varieties of native bush. (South Auckland Education Board collection)



There was always something to do, even on a cold day: dangling a fishing line down at the Port Waikato wharf. (Taranaki Daily News photo, South Auckland Education Board collection)



*'Which way do I go now?'
Learning how to use a compass.
(South Auckland Education Board
Collection)*

an owner, and therefore had become Crown property! The Health Camps Board had to take further legal action to get it back. It took until November 1972 before the Health Camps Board finally obtained title to the camp property.

By now the Education Department's 15-year lease of the camp had only 5 years to run, and the School Camps Committee was concerned about what the Health Camps Board would do with the camp. In 1974 their fears were confirmed when the Board announced that it intended to sell the property as soon as the lease expired.

John Marshall and the School Camps Committee protested that selling the Port Waikato Camp 'would be a betrayal of trust, as in all negotiations between the original Camp League and the...Health Camps Board it was clear that the intention was to retain the property for the use of pupils in the South Auckland area'.³ They argued that 'under no circumstances should any considerations, financial or otherwise, allow this property to pass from the control of the South Auckland Education Board for the benefit of the children of the South Auckland Education district.'⁴

After a lot of sparring, in April 1975 representatives of the Health Camps Board, the Department of Education and the South Auckland Education Board met to discuss the future of the Port Waikato Camp.

The Health Camps Board explained that it was planning a new health camp for the region, at Rotorua, and it needed to sell any unused assets to help finance that project. The Port Waikato Camp property would therefore have to be sold when the present lease to the Education Department ran out at the end of 1977. Would the education authorities consider buying it?

But the Education Department and the South Auckland Education Board insisted that they had no authority to spend education funds on buying property for a school camp. They also argued against any suggestion of raising funds from the community to purchase a camp which they considered the community had already paid for.

However, all parties agreed that school camps were an excellent use of Port Waikato Camp and should continue if possible. It was just a matter of finance.

Perhaps the government could help? If the Health Camps Board could be provided with additional government finance for its proposed Rotorua Health Camp, then it would not have to sell Port Waikato Camp.

And that is what happened. With the supporters of Port Waikato Camp lobbying their members of parliament, the amount of the government grant to the Health Camps Board was generously increased and the Board agreed to gift the Port Waikato Camp property back to the Crown for use as a school camp.⁵

As usual, the legal wheels turned very slowly and it was not until September 1983 that it was finally gazetted as Crown property. Port Waikato Camp was thus wrested back from the Health Camps Board to continue to be used and enjoyed as a school camp. William Paul would have cheered.

The End of State Support

In 1985 the School Camps Committee of the Hamilton Education Board (as the South Auckland Education Board had recently been renamed) commented in its annual report that 'Port Waikato, as an outdoor education base camp, has few equals'. But even so, the committee added, the outlook for the Port Waikato Camp was most uncertain. 'It is essential that decisions be taken over the future of this camp.'¹

The problem was the lack of finance for maintenance and development of the camp. Ever since Port Waikato had been used for school camps it had been run on goodwill and minimal funding. The Port Waikato Camp was not alone in this. The Department of Education and successive governments had resisted calls to fund school camps. The funding for the Port Waikato Camp agreed by the Minister at the time of the lease agreement in 1963 and again in 1971 were in fact the only grants for any school camp up to that time. Then in 1973-74 the government agreed to a system of small grants to Education Boards for maintaining and equipping school camps, and also belatedly amended the Education Act to legalise the holding of school classes at school camps. The official recognition for school camping was welcome but the funding was still minimal - the South Auckland Education Board initially received less than \$6,000 a year for maintaining and equipping not just the Port Waikato Camp but all the school camps in its region. This system of grants for school camping was short-lived - it was abolished in 1983, shortly before the Port Waikato Camp finally became fully Crown-owned. However, some funding for the Port Waikato Camp was obtained when the Department of Education agreed to provide maintenance funding for those of the camp buildings used as teaching spaces, under the same formula applied to schools. This brought a similar amount to the previous grants - about \$6,000 a year.

Much more than this was needed. In 1985 a report for the Hamilton Education Board on the condition of the Port Waikato Camp spelled out what had been obvious for some time. Not only were the camp buildings now nearly 60 years old and badly in need of maintenance and renovation, but the facilities which had originally been built in the 1930s and 40s to cater for several hundred children a year, were now quite inadequate for several thousand children a year in the 1980s and beyond. Major work was required, especially to provide an adequate sewerage system, but also to upgrade the kitchen, replace old electrical wiring, re-roof all the buildings, repair or replace broken furniture and equipment, and replace the crumbling old farmhouse used by the caretaker and re-site it where he could oversee the camp. The total cost for all this was estimated at \$425,000. If only the most essential work were done the cost would still be \$235,000.

The Hamilton Education Board could not fund this out of its existing allocation and the Department of Education would not provide any further financial assistance. The Board was thus faced with the prospect that the Port Waikato Camp might have to be closed.

When this suggestion was reported in the newspapers there were immediate protests. The next meeting of the Hamilton Education Board was told there was 'a strong body of opinion, led by the present management committee, which considers closure of the camp would deprive schools in our district of a unique outdoor education resource. No other camp within range of this Board's schools is able to offer the diversity of teaching environments available at Port Waikato Camp.' The Board began considering what other options there might be for maintaining and funding the camp.

However, these discussions were overtaken by bigger events. The government was embarking on a radical programme of reform of state agencies in all areas, including education. Under the education reform programme known as 'Tomorrow's Schools' which was announced in August 1988, control of schools was to be taken from the regional Education Boards and devolved to local school Boards of Trustees. The existing bureaucracy of the Department of Education was to be scaled down to a slimmer Ministry; and the Education Boards were to be abolished altogether.

Where school camps such as Port Waikato might fit under the new structure was not clear. The Education Board's Port Waikato Camp Committee and the Physical Education and Science Advisers were concerned that the camp might be left to close, or be sold off. There was some urgency, as the Education Board and its administration of the Port Waikato Camp was to disappear with the full implementation of the 'Tomorrow's Schools' reforms on 1 October 1989. Some new organisation which could administer the camp and try to find the solution to its maintenance problems would be required - perhaps a Trust Board, rather like those being formed to govern each school.

Thus in May 1989 a letter was sent to all the schools and other groups which had used the camp in recent years, asking whether they were interested in helping to form a new body to run the camp and keep it going. Most of the 16 replies received were strongly in favour of keeping the camp going, and even offered people who would serve on a controlling board or committee.

On the Hamilton Education Board there was some scepticism that the camp could be kept going. But given these expressions of support, the Board agreed that a meeting of interested parties should be held to try to establish a Trust Board to operate Port Waikato Camp after the Education Board's administration ceased.

So much was happening that it was not until several weeks after the end of the Education Board and the changeover to 'Tomorrow's Schools' on 1 October that the meeting was held. Fourteen people turned up: teachers, Physical Education and Science Advisers and others who had been involved with the Port Waikato Camp and were keen to see it continue. They agreed to form themselves into a camp trust committee to take up the task. There was some continuity with the Camp Committee which had administered the camp under the Education Board - its chairman, Len Hay, was elected chairman for the new camp trust committee and several other members of the old committee joined as well.

The trust committee picked up the administration of the school camp programme at Port Waikato Camp, which was fully booked for the rest of the year. There were problems of maintenance and funding which would have to be faced. First, however, the trust committee formalised its position by incorporating as the Port Waikato Camp School Trust, and then began negotiating with the Ministry of Education for some kind of contract or agreement to formalise its control of the Port Waikato Camp.

Negotiating the occupancy agreement turned out to be far more difficult than first expected. Local Ministry officials were keen to see an agreement concluded, but when draft agreements were submitted to Wellington there were endless objections and delays. The issue that seemed to be behind the delays, and which caused the Trust the most concern, was that the Ministry of Education, like all government agencies, was being required to identify 'surplus' assets which could be sold. It was thus drawing up a list of properties considered 'surplus to educational requirements' to meet a sales target of \$75 million.² The Camp Trust feared that Port Waikato Camp might be on this list and earmarked for sale.

This seemed to be borne out by clauses in the occupancy agreement offered by the Ministry, which allowed it to terminate the agreement 'if the land is deemed to be surplus or is required for any other purpose'. John Mathieson for the Trust negotiated with Ministry officials, and gained the support of the local Member of Parliament, Simon Upton, who was able to make the case directly to Ministers. Eventually they succeeded in having the Port Waikato Camp ruled off the sale list, and the occupancy agreement altered to allow termination (and possible sale) only if the camp was 'no longer needed for educational purposes'.³

This seemed as much of a guarantee as the Trust could hope for, and so in November 1992 the occupancy agreement between the Trust and the Ministry of Education was finally signed. John Willis, the new Trust chairman, felt that it was none too soon:

The camp trust are delighted, that after three years of unnecessary frustrating delays and needless bureaucratic obstacles originating from Wellington, that at last we have been able to negotiate an acceptable occupancy agreement with the Ministry of Education.... We now know that the camp has a future, that the time and effort the trust has put into the camp so far has not been wasted, and that another generation of children will be able to use this unique facility.

But he also noted that the Trust had been forced to accept clauses in the agreement making it entirely responsible for the camp, its costs and its maintenance. The Ministry of Education would not be providing any funding at all. Ministry officials, like those of the old Hamilton Board of Education, were clearly sceptical that the camp was worth saving or spending money on, or that the Trust would be able to keep it going. It was now up to the Trust members to prove them wrong.



Signing the Occupancy Agreement formalising the Camp Trust's control of Port Waikato Camp, 13 November 1992: John Willis, Trust chairman, Simon Upton, MP for Raglan, and John Mathieson, the Trust's chief negotiator for the agreement. Also signing was Des Butler, the Ministry of Education's Hamilton Property Manager, who took the photograph.

Rejuvenation

The Work of the Port Waikato Camp School Trust

When the Port Waikato Camp School Trust inherited the responsibility for the Port Waikato Camp in 1989 on the demise of the old Education Board administration, the camp was in a poor state of repair, and barely operable. The Trust did not wait for the formal agreement giving it control of the camp to be finalised before moving to try to deal with some of the more pressing problems. Trust members and other supporters began a routine of working bees in their own time to do basic maintenance and repair jobs, and sponsors were found to fund the purchase of urgently needed equipment, such as a new washing machine. The Trust also set out to raise the camp's public profile. It held open days, inviting the local community and others interested to look over the camp and see what the Trust was aiming to do. In addition the Trust also made the camp and the facilities it had to offer more widely available. It was still much in use for school camps, especially in the first two terms of the school year, but it was free at other times. Thus, hiring the camp out for other purposes, even for weddings and family gatherings, brought in much-needed revenue and helped relations with the local Port Waikato community.

Once the occupancy agreement was signed in 1992 and the Trust had some security of tenure, it moved ahead more boldly with larger projects. The income from camp fees was enough to cover operational costs and some basic maintenance, but the essential major works could only be financed by grants and donations. Consequently Trust members became adept at the business of fundraising and obtaining grants. And by investing much of their own time and effort as well, and doing as much of the work as they could themselves - with help from supporters, service clubs, and Periodic Detention gangs - they were able to achieve an extraordinary programme of renovation and upgrading of the Port Waikato Camp.

Shortly before the occupancy agreement was signed the camp was broken into and equipment burgled - the second such incident within a few years. The first project was thus to build a more secure concrete-block storeroom. The incident also pointed to the need for a resident caretaker. Olga and Trevor Benton, the owners of the land across the road (which had once been the camp farm) generously agreed to gift a section overlooking the Port Waikato Camp. This made an ideal site for a house from where the caretaker could keep an eye on the camp. The Trust obtained grants and after some searching found a suitable small house which was moved onto the site. It was completed (at a total cost of \$84,000) ready for the newly appointed caretaker to start in June 1994.

Other projects were already under way. The dormitories badly needed work: after 60 years the original floors and roofs were both full of holes. The old bitumen seal used as flooring had been disintegrating for years and the roofs leaked badly when it rained. However, with support from BHP New Zealand Steel and the Lotteries Grants Board, the dormitories and all the camp buildings were re-roofed, and work also began to concrete the dormitory floors and reseal all the pathways.

The dormitories were then upgraded further by adding new shower blocks, complete with bathrooms suitable for people with disabilities. This was another big undertaking, helped by Periodic Detention gangs barrowing in most of the backfill and materials. The eventual completion of the new shower blocks in 2000 meant that children no longer had to cross the Waikaretu Road to have a shower.

In 1998 an old problem came to the fore again when there was a complaint about sewage pollution. The Trust



Another Camp Trust working bee. April 2000.
Don Crawford, Peter Houghton and Chris Paton pour
the footings for a new shower room for 'Spargo' boys' dormitory.



The Camp Trust worked hard to upgrade the camp and put it in good order: 'Spargo' boys' dormitory in 2000, repainted, reroofed, and shower room completed.

had to apply for a new water discharge consent from the regional authority, Environment Waikato, and, after consulting with local people, upgrade the system to meet the required standard. This became another major project, which took four years and over \$40,000 to complete. 'The system is working well at the moment', Trust chairman John Willis finally reported with considerable relief in 2002; 'and long may it continue!' At the same time a new rainwater tank and water purifier were installed to improve the quality of drinking water.

The next upgrade to meet modern health and safety standards was in the area of fire safety. To meet new fire safety regulations it was necessary to install a hard-wired smoke and heat alarm system, and provide fire retardant protection for the old wooden buildings - especially the dormitories. For the latter requirement, instead of totally relining the buildings, the Trust decided to retain the original wall panelling and apply special fire retardant paint. This laborious job was done again with help from Periodic Detention gangs who washed, scraped and sanded the varnished tongue-and-groove panelling ready for painting. This job also was eventually completed in 2002, at a cost of \$48,700.

The whole camp was thus improved and upgraded without changing the basic plan or the charm of the historic buildings. In order to provide more natural lighting in the Caesar Roose dining room, new windows and skylights were installed. This involved a great deal of work removing the old ceiling and totally reconstructing it, but the final result was very satisfactory - providing more light while preserving the character of the original dining room.

Other work was done in the environmental area. With a grant from Environment Waikato work was done to protect the Bald Spur bush reserve and plant more native trees. The boundary fencing of the bush reserve area was finally completed to protect it from damage by stock. This, along with regular possum control, helped to help protect the bush, in line with the wishes of the original donor in 1928, Edward Spargo, that it should be preserved 'for all time'.

By 2002 many major projects had been completed. As the occupancy agreement with the Ministry of Education approached the end of its term in November 2002, the Trust began negotiating to try to obtain a more favourable agreement for a further term. Trust Chairman John Willis recalls how in 1989 the Hamilton Education Board had '*entrusted the care of the camp to a group of interested camp users and the trust began life with a consultant's report which indicated that a quarter of a million dollars of maintenance was required to bring the camp up to standard.*'

At that time the camp had been in a very run down and dilapidated condition and many doubted that it could be saved. But, as John Willis points out, the Port Waikato Camp has not just been saved, but entirely rejuvenated:

The camp's detractors did not recognise the need for this camp to continue nor that the dedication, enthusiasm and determination of a group of volunteers can rescue and revitalise many a lost cause. Over the last twelve years the camp trust has spent in excess of \$1,000,000 on operating, maintaining and developing this Crown property and during this time the trust has rebuilt, re-roofed, repainted, remodelled, refurbished, redeveloped, resealed, re-fenced, replanted, and re-established this camp as a leading outdoor educational facility.

All this has been financed from camp fees, grants, donations and fundraising, with no state support or subsidy. The camp is flourishing. It is fully occupied by school groups from February to early May and again at the end of the school year, with about 1200 children and 500 accompanying adults enjoying school camps at Port Waikato each year. In between school camps it is also used for weddings, funerals, family reunions, birthday parties, and activities by various clubs and other groups. John Willis speaks for the Trust with justifiable pride:

I am a real fan of the Port Waikato Camp and I marvel at the progress this camp has made.



Still upgrading - installing a new water tank, 2001



'Welcome to Port Waikato Camp!' Trust Chairman John Willis at an Open Day, October 1996.

10: Port Waikato Camp in the 2000s

Under the administration of the Port Waikato Camp School Trust the camp has been used by a wide range of groups and as a venue for weddings, family reunions and other functions. But the main purpose of the Port Waikato Camp is still as a school camp. Although it no longer has the pre-eminent position it once did and has to compete with many other camps now available to schools, the Port Waikato Camp continues to host many school camps. Some schools now have a long tradition of school camps at Port Waikato and have been coming back year after year. Teachers from two of these schools describe their experiences:

The children from Ngatea Primary School on the Hauraki Plains go to Port Waikato every second year. It is something they seem to look forward to. They have listened to the previous students talking about the things they have experienced and the fun they have had, yet just before camp they do begin to wonder about the things they are going to have to do without.

Shock, horror! How will the 11-13 year olds be able to survive without TV, MacDonalds, sweets, Coke... for eight whole days!

Yet after the first day things seem to settle down and the children are actually talking to one another, having a conversation, comparing the activities they did during the day.

After about the third day their dormitories become "home" and there is a fierce competition to be the best dorm at inspection time. This inspection is done just before breakfast. What bribery and corruption goes on. The "inspectors" receive flowers, coffee and anything else the children can think of. Of course the parents in charge of each dormitory also join in to the spirit of the competition.

Camp duties that the children have to do are the setting up the dining room for meals, doing the dishes ready for the steriliser, preparing the vegetables, cleaning the toilets and bathrooms, tidying the grounds and odd jobs which may involve preparing lunches for the day, cleaning windows and sweeping floors. There is always at least one adult with each group. It is amazing what you find out about kids when they do their duties. How few have ever swept the floor or set the table, and as for cleaning a bathroom or toilet - well, they often didn't realise that someone actually does this in their house!

Morrinsville Primary School also runs a traditional 7 day camp, with the children helping, and with a wide range of outdoor activities:

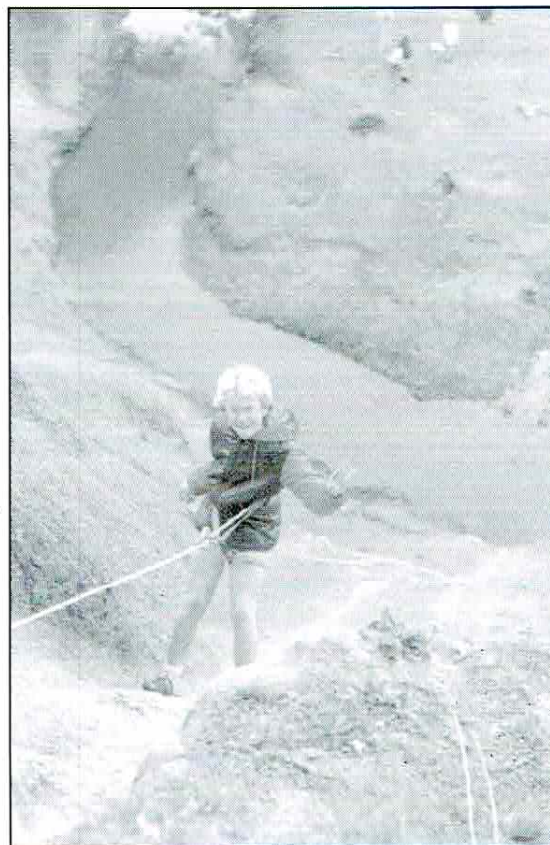
It is essentially a self-help camp where teachers, children and parents work together to provide a variety of social, and daily living skills through participation in camp duties, e.g. dishes, vegetable preparation, toilet cleaning duty, table setting and ground duties.

In the outdoors the children: abseil; bush walk; swim; study rock pools and sand dunes; fossil hunt. All areas of the curriculum are covered.

We cover both the walks, Bald Spur on the first day and Devlin's dash later in the week. We bring in our own abseilers. This has been one of the major changes over the last 10 years. Our risk management is total, covering every activity that we do. We are especially vigilant with the ratio of 1 adult to every 4 children. Another of the changes is the difficulty getting enough parent help. This is because of the high percentage of working parents. We now have parents coming and going all week.

Over the last 10 years the facilities of the camp have improved, making camp much easier. Gone are the days of a trail of soap, flannels and undies over the road to the showers.

'I can do it!' Thousands of children have learned how, plucked up their courage, and safely abseiled down the cliff.



Morrinsville's school camps follow a well-established programme of activities:

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
a.m.	Arrive at Port Waikato Camp	Groups 1. & 2. Tent Pitching & Stream study 3. Cooking 4. Abseiling	1. Abseiling 2. Cooking 3. Fossils 4. Fossils	Pack & Walk to Campout	Devlin's Dash	Return From campout Clean gear	Pack up
Lunch	Family Picnic	Lunch at camp	Packed lunch	Packed lunch	Packed lunch	Lunch at camp	Early lunch at reserve
p.m.	Camp Orientation Bald Spur Walk Sand dunes	1. Cooking 2. Abseiling 3 & 4 Tent pitching & Stream study	1 & 2. Fossils 3. Abseiling 4. Cooking	Setting fires	Devlin's Dash continued Rockpools	Games & swim At Big Bay	Leave for home
Evening	Burma Trail	Drama Night	Preparing for campout	Setting traps	Campfire Concert	Disco	

The camp is of shorter duration than in past years, and there is no longer a camp commandant or a Physical Education Adviser in charge - teachers run the camp themselves (after receiving some training at the camp beforehand if necessary). The regimentation of the past has gone, but there are still rules, for instance to try to keep the boys from straying across to the girls' dormitory - and vice versa.

Ngatea follows a similar programme:

The activities that the children take part in are - on the first afternoon climbing Bald Spur. Now that is a challenge even to the fittest of children and even more of a challenge to the adults. Other activities are abseiling, tramping through the bush on Devlin's Dash and, if they are lucky, they walk home along the beach and over the rocks. They camp out overnight in tents and have to cook their own meals over an open fire. They spend a day down on the beach hunting in rock pools, girls screeching when they see the first crab, making sand sculptures in the damp sand, eating sandy sandwiches and having real fun. They even get good at identifying some of the creatures and plants. On the way home from the beach the group often spend some time in the sand dunes, leaping off banks, rolling, doing somersaults and generally just having fun. The black sand is a bit of a challenge to get off bodies and out of clothes, but this is part of camp. On the last full day they take part in small groups in an orienteering activity which involves reading six-figure grid map references and walking for kilometres.



Goodwood School setting out from Port Waikato Camp in the morning for an overnight camp-out.

For both Morrinsville and Ngatea the highlight of the camp is still the camp-out. Morrinsville has a two night camp-out where all children and adults camp together:

The children have to become self-reliant by pitching their own tents, setting fires and cooking their own meals. The adults are encouraged to be supportive but not to take over. The cutting of firewood is endless. The adults have their own large communal fire where the children can come and sit. One of the teachers is renowned for cooking chickens in a Dutch oven in the fire - delicious, especially in the middle of the night.

Ngatea School has a special camp-out for a picked group of 16-20 children with a teacher and five or six parents out at the Huriwai stream:

This involves taking all their gear - tents, food, cooking utensils, sleeping bags and personal gear in a pack with them. They tramp for two or three hours south along the Waikaretu Road to the Huriwai stream where they set up camp for two nights. One of the challenges for this group is to find or catch their food for one meal. Over the years they have had fish, mussels, eel, and goose. This group always return to camp buzzing, and full of the stories of how they caught their food, how wet they got the time it rained, what they did when the wind blew their tent down, and other little 'stories' about some of the things that happened.

Camp at Port Waikato is a wonderful place to get to know kids, and it is also a wonderful place for kids to get to know that other people do some things the same way as them, and others do things in a totally different way. By the end of eight or nine days the children have had so many experiences and learnt so much. They come back with wonderful memories.¹

The Port Waikato Camp still retains its magic!



Camping out - the tent is up and the billy boiling for tea.
Morrinsville Primary School - c. 1980s



Lunch tastes even better when you have
cooked it over the fire yourself.
Waikerua, Korakonui, Te Kawa and
Tiheroas - 1977
(J. Willis photo)

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Over its 75 years, Port Waikato camp has always been first and foremost a camp for children. When William Paul and Hilda Ross first established it during the Depression years of the 1920s it was to provide seaside holidays for the children of poor families. Later it was drawn into the health camp movement, aiming also to build up the health and vigour of undernourished, unfit children. The summer camps at Port Waikato became much like those at other health camps around the country, although William Paul and Hilda Ross had the skill and determination, and the independent funding through their own efforts, to retain control of the Port Waikato Camp when health camps elsewhere came increasingly under centralised control. When the inevitable rupture with the Health Camp authorities came, in 1958, William Paul saw to it that the camp continued to be used for the benefit of the children of the Waikato region. The advent of school camping just at this time provided a new direction for the Port Waikato Camp and brought in many more children, and a new set of activities and adventures. The shift to school camping also eventually brought about the transfer of ownership to the Crown, with effective control exercised through the South Auckland (later Hamilton) Education Board, and then, when the Board was abolished in 1989 under 'Tomorrow's Schools', to the Port Waikato Camp School Trust of volunteer supporters.

Indeed the success of the Port Waikato Camp has always owed much to the commitment and enthusiasm of its supporters - and not only in the early period of William Paul and Hilda Ross and their Waikato Children's Camp League, and the recent period of the Port Waikato Camp School Trust. The Education Board's Physical Education and Nature Study Advisers who administered and mainly ran the school camps from 1956 to 1989 did a great deal more out of personal interest and enthusiasm than they were ever paid to do. Between them all they created, maintained and developed the Port Waikato Camp, and provided camps enjoyed and remembered by many thousands of children - probably approaching 75,000 over the 75 years.

And what of the future? The present chairman of the Port Waikato Camp School Trust, John Willis, comments on recent trends, and some challenges for the future:

...keeping a high level of camp occupancy is one of the major challenges facing the trust. Over the years the average length of stay [of school camps] has gradually dwindled from 10 days in the 1960's and 70's, to 7 days in the 1980's and 90's and now to 5 days or even 3 in some cases in this new century. Factors that have influenced this trend may have been teachers being deterred by requirements to do with safety and health; the paper workload on teachers and their belief that weekends should now be for themselves, the changing requirements schools have for their outdoor education programmes and the difficulty, for very real reasons, that some schools experience in obtaining enough parental help for longer periods. The number of children per camp has also declined possibly influenced by lower class sizes and the apparent reluctance of smaller schools to combine with each other, as they were encouraged to do in earlier times.

Monday to Friday school camps now means more weekends are available for other community groups and activities, and we now need to advertise this fact more widely in the Franklin area, especially the fact that the camp is a wonderful venue for weddings and family reunions. There is also the challenge of trying to fill the second and third terms which at this moment generate little or no income.

Another trend, which the Trust members have very mixed feelings about, is the decreasing level of involvement children (and teachers!) have at camp. Port Waikato has always prided itself on being a "self-help" camp whereby children and adults all work together to make the camp function.

Typical duties carried out by children with parental guidance include vege and meal preparation and cooking, dish washing and pot scrubbing, table setting and clearing, bed making, and the cleaning of toilets, buildings and grounds. These duties plus the other activities make the camp second to none in providing children with numerous opportunities for problem solving and the development of real life skills and the nurturing of the all important attributes of independence, initiative, self discipline, reliance, resourcefulness, responsibility, tolerance, and compassion.

There is now a tendency developing for some schools to employ outside providers to do the catering, specific activities such as abseiling, caving or kayaking, or even to run the whole camp. Trust members accept

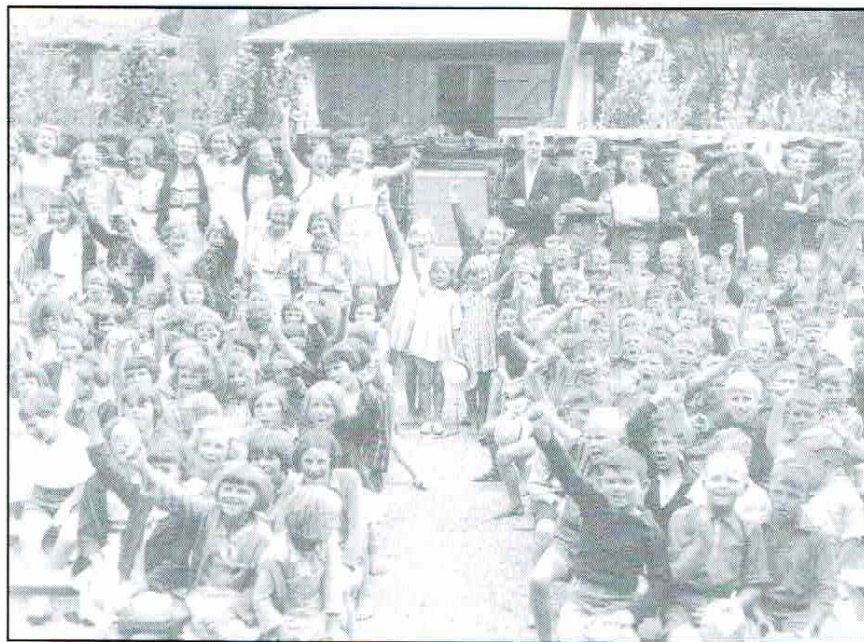
this as a reality of life but rue the fact that many of the life skills and character-building aspects of camp are not being utilised to the children's best advantage.

Camp leaders and supervisors invariably speak highly of the camp and what it has to offer schools seeking to give children never-to-be-forgotten educational experiences outside the classroom. Port Waikato was the first camp in the country to provide live-in outdoor educational facilities for schools and the Trust believes this camp is still leading the way in this field!

John Willis feels some anxiety at the lack of new people coming forward to take up the work of the Trust and keep the camp going - 'this is a worry as we need new personnel to keep the trust alive and well for the future.' But if past history is anything to go by, new leaders will step forward when needed.

The Port Waikato Camp has certainly exercised a magnetic appeal: people have retained their enthusiasm and kept coming back. Hilda Ross and William Paul established the camp and continued to run it for 30 years, attending camp each year for most of that time. Even when Hilda Ross went on to become a busy member of parliament and Cabinet Minister she still found time to go to camp and help with the tasks. Madoline Cobb went as the camp nurse for 16 years and Florence Allen, William Paul's secretary at the Waikato Winter Show Association, managed to do the secretarial work for his camp activities as well for 25 years. Then, in its new reincarnation as the model school camp, John Marshall became a driving force and camp executive officer for 20 years and Barry Cowley, after beginning as a more junior Physical Education Adviser, continued his involvement for over 30 years. And then when the camp suddenly lost its institutional support when the Hamilton Education Board disappeared with the advent of 'Tomorrow's Schools' in 1989, a group of individual supporters who were determined not to let the Port Waikato Camp die, formed the present Camp School Trust to carry it on. Some of them had already been involved on the camp committee under the Education Board for many years. Today, after 13 years of Trust operation, Don Crawford, Laurence Gaylor, Len and Lucy Hay, Bill Noble and John Willis are still on the Trust, working to maintain and improve the camp. The place draws people back.

The camp has been improved and upgraded, but there is still much of the atmosphere of those times when William Paul and Hilda Ross first brought children to camp here. Children today travel easily to the camp by bus and car rather than the long river voyage by Caesar Roose's paddle-steamer, and when they get there the dormitories are brighter and drier than they used to be and there are hot showers rather than washing in the stream. But Port Waikato, there by the silver sea, is still a beautiful, uncrowded place, and going to the Port Waikato Camp it remains an exciting adventure waiting to be enjoyed by many more children for years to come.



In the 1930s as in the 2000s, thousands of children have had a wonderful time at Port Waikato Camp. 'Making New Zealand' collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

Footnotes

The abbreviation PWCST indicates material held by the Port Waikato Camp School Trust.

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Chapter 10: Port Waikato Camp in the 2000s

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Chapter 11: Looking Back and Looking Forward

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