

ARBORISTS EXCHANGE REPORT

By Bill Diedrich

What do Ft. Wayne, Indiana and Wellington City, New Zealand have in common? Well, most of the same urban forest management issues we all share, for starters. This is one of many discoveries made by Ft. Wayne City Arborist Bill Diedrich on his recent sojourn to New Zealand as part of the Society of Municipal Arborist's Exchange Program. Bill is the first of four awardees to participate in the program, and he shares his antipodal experience with us in the following article. Later in the year we'll also hear from Mike Esson, his New Zealand host and counterpart, and from city arborists in Chicago and Cape Town, South Africa about their exchange. Here is the first report from the highly successful Arborists Exchange Program sponsored by the SMA and ACRT.

Douglas Still
Chair, SMA Exchange Program Committee



Bill resting on a Kauri tree.
Photos: Bill Diedrich

My trip began as I left Fort Wayne, IN on February 8. We flew over the Pacific for 16 hours and I got to Auckland at 8 a.m. on Monday morning and met Mike Esson, an arborist for Auckland. Our first trip was to see the Kauri trees, which are the largest trees in New Zealand. They are like redwoods in California.

They have one 2000-year-old Kauri and plenty of youngsters around that are a few hundred years old. There are large areas planted with Monterey Pine and Monterey cypress, both of which were imported from California.

The pines are planted and then in 25 years they are clear-cut and replanted. The clear-cutting is causing problems with erosion. Some foresters are trying to convince people to institute selective cutting of the pine stands, or return to native timber species.

We then drove to Hamilton and spent a few days there. I met the city forester who showed me several large Hamilton parks, the arboretum, and many street trees. The Hamilton Park was fantastic. They had formal gardens, a Japanese garden, a Chinese garden, an Italian garden, and a rose garden. Just outside of Hamilton I got to see a sawmill. Mike Esson has a business partner, and they are salvaging the wood from the trees that are being removed in urban areas. They had many different kinds of wood that had been cut, were drying, and were waiting to be marketed.

We left Hamilton and traveled to Wellington. Halfway to Wellington, we camped at Tongarero National Park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. We saw subtropical trees at low elevations on the mountain. It looked like a set from the movie Jurassic Park. We saw

temperate vegetation a bit higher up on the mountain, and finally, alpine vegetation on top. When we went around to the other side of the mountain, we saw a desert.

I did not see much flat land during my entire visit. Everything seemed to be uphill. Wellington, which is located on the hills around the harbor, contains a group of homes and then a greenbelt area higher on the hills, then another section of homes, and then more greenbelt. Mike is evaluating the Monterey pines on the greenbelt. Some are old and showing signs of decay. As he evaluates different sections, the dangerous trees are being removed. The area is so hilly that some of the trees have to be taken out by helicopter. This is a method of removal that we never see in Fort Wayne. We just pull the bucket truck up next to the tree and go to work.

We flew from Wellington to Christchurch on the south island. The city was very nice and had many formal gardens and parks. The trees in the city are getting old and showing signs of decay. The city forester is removing the dangerous trees while also planting and maintaining vigorous young healthy trees.

I was fortunate to meet John W. who owns a large forest area and manages both pine stands and native stands using selective cutting. As an urban forester I had not thought about this aspect of timber forestry since college. The same conflict between native trees and introduced species was a topic of discussion in all of the cities I visited.

After three days on the south island we flew back to Wellington. I saw how Mike evaluated the trees in the greenbelt area and in the arboretum. I also saw an area of the park that had only native vegetation. The city arborist took me on a tour of the city, looking at street trees. Many of the trees are growing out of the side of almost vertical cliffs making management of the right-of-way very different than in Fort Wayne. There were some neighborhoods that contained trees in a curb lawn area. The species were different, but the way they were managed was the same as in Fort Wayne. I also saw the city nursery where they grow flowers for the parks and trees for both the streets and greenbelt areas.

On the last day in Wellington we had a cookout and I got to meet the tree crews. It seems that beer is the drink of choice of tree crews in Wellington. After much conversation, I think that there is very little difference between Wellington and Fort Wayne. It is hilly there and the trees are a different species and are bigger, but the work done by the crews is the same. When we left, I was given the park flag as a memento, and Mike and I headed for New Plymouth.

We arrived outside of New Plymouth late at night. The stars were beautiful. I saw the Southern Cross and half of the universe that I had never seen from the northern hemisphere. We stayed at Mike's friend's house. He was not home so he just left the key by the front door. We went in and went to bed. The next morning when we got up I saw the volcano. This home was on a farm with a view you would not believe. We went into New Plymouth to meet the manager of the park/arboretum. He gave us a tour of the place.



Mike Esson (on the right) at the sawmill outside of Hamilton.

He wants to install a walkway from one side of the gully to the other so that people can walk through the crowns of the trees.

He did the first thinning to a stand of Kauri trees. They are just babies now, but give them a few hundred more years and they will really be impressive. He also is on the list to get some of the seedlings of an ancient pine tree that they found in Australia. He will be planting them in 2005. They were probably growing in the native

forests along with the Kauri trees 100 million years ago.

The greenhouses were fantastic. One was for orchids, one for ferns, and another for begonias. You got from one greenhouse to the other through a series of tunnels. The fountains and waterfall were great. We then saw the cricket field, but it had been turned into a Japanese training camp for the movie *The Last Samurai* that they were filming. We then walked along the coast where I collected black beach sand.

As this was now close to the end of my adventure, I got up the nerve to ask Mike to drive his Toyota Land Rover. I drove for about 30 minutes on the wrong side of the road. I drove through one traffic circle ('suicide circle') and shortly thereafter decided I had enough. After 40 years of driving the USA way, it would take a long time to get confident driving the British way.

The primary thing I realized from this experience was that despite the differences in tree species, the faster growth rates, and the topography, tree management is very similar halfway around the world. Would I do this again? You bet I would!

Words cannot express my gratitude and thanks to the SMA for developing this program and especially to ACRT for providing the funds to make this entire experience possible.

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