

Volunteer Profile

Thinking back to NZ and cutting tracks for the New Zealand Forest Service. Over the mountains, on the Ureweras, Kaimanawas, Mt Egmont, Eyre Mountains, and the Takitimus.

The weapon of choice was a tool called a slasher, a rectangle block of steel, 30cm long, 3cm thick, tapering down to a razor-sharp edge, attached to a 120cm hickory handle. One swing with this weapon, would cut through branches, small logs, pungas, legs, arms, wild boar, and even take the top of a King Brown, if you get my drift.

Now here I am 58 years later, allocated a stretch of track – Nut Road lookout to Conspicuous Beach.

I say to myself “Ok, I’ll do a point-to-point section of the track, check it out. Easy, just a walk in the park, right?”

Wrong.

In my mind’s eye, there’s rays of sun shining through the bush canopy, butterflies here and there, birds singing happily, the smell of fresh bush in the coolness of early morning, and back to the car for lunch. It’s a piece of cake when you’re 19.

Reality – into the pack goes First aid kit, PLB, phone (she hasn’t called me yet, hope everything’s ok, she managed to put the bins out), 3 litres water, 2 Snickers, maintenance handbook, Common Weeds handbook, batteries, handsaw, secateurs, gloves, reading glasses... and the rest!

And we’re off. Oh so peaceful! Sunshine, trees swaying in the wind. A mouse runs across the track, or was it a snake? Dust here and there, over-grown track. Click goes the shears, and click goes the tendons in my arms. Scrape goes the rake, and scrape goes my shins. Cut lower, boyo! The track’s looking better, it’s just like giving the bush a haircut. Some parts are better than others.

Oh, so much pleasure – but oh, so much pain! My pack’s doubled in weight. Where’s 8 hours gone?

I walk back to the start, seeing what I’ve accomplished – and missed! A 30 metre section.

Tomorrow’s another day. I’m DONE!

Happy Hill Hiker ... Happy New Volunteer!

David Ashcroft