

UPDATE ON OKAREKA MISTLETOE RESTORATION PROJECT

Paul Cashmore

So far this year we have had two workdays. At the February workday we were greeted with a great mass of weeds competing with our restoration plantings as had happened in spring. The bindweed which was rampantly smothering plants in spring had been brought under control during our November releasing, but this had been mainly replaced by black nightshade on the lower slopes with wild turnip above. A small team of half a dozen volunteers hand-weeded the area fairly quickly then followed up with knapsack-releasing and further control of other weeds elsewhere in the Reserve and also in the Tikitapu Scenic Reserve.

In April there was less weed competition and it didn't take long to clear and release our plantings. This allowed us to move down the road and continue where we had left off in 2004 with tackling weeds in the vicinity of the reserve opposite the Okareka Store site. Some follow-up control of jasmine infestations treated previously was undertaken along with hand-pulling of cherries. We cut our way through blackberry into a newly discovered jasmine infestation amongst the wattle 'grove' further along Okareka Loop Rd. This was manually cut and then sprayed. Some chainsaw work followed on the wattles and we managed to remove about half the 'grove' with the remainder targeted for winter.

Although our turnouts this year have been relatively small we have achieved a good level of weed control through hard work, use of correct techniques and good organisation of equipment and people. As a result our plantings are growing rapidly and the survival rate is good – probably at least 70%. Unfortunately some plants were lost in March when careless roadside spraying killed some of them around the top of the bank near the existing tree lucerne. I have subsequently spoken to Castlecorp staff and asked them to keep away from this area in the future.

Over the coming winter months we will be able to focus on felling more wattles and cherries along Okareka Loop Rd. There will be minimal work required to prepare the sites for spring planting as only a small number of plants are required to fill a few gaps amongst last year's plantings.

I have prepared an annual report to Environment Bay of Plenty on progress-to-date for the Environmental Enhancement Fund from which we are receiving funding for the project. I was also asked to show Environment Bay of Plenty Regional Councillors around the project site in late March during their visit to Okareka. In half an hour I was able to show them the main areas of work and explain the project. Unfortunately it was raining fairly heavily at the time which dampened the enthusiasm somewhat. However, we received positive feedback on this and regional councillors and staff appear happy with the progress we are making.



Our plantings at Okareka after releasing from weeds in February 2005. Photo J Hobbs