

As *time*  
*goes* by

WHAT STARTED AS  
two-pound camp sites  
HAVE BECOME A PASSIONATELY DEFENDED  
STYLE OF island life.

PICTURES Tessa Chrisp & Al Guthrie WORDS James Graham  
PHOTO ALBUMS Christine Cutler & Andy Heyward

Right: An early photo of the bach currently being restored. Below: Three generations – in the middle, Audrey Culpin. The bach being restored in present day. Bach38 at Rangī Wharf.



Left: Sisters Barbara and Christine, daughters of Audrey Culpin above, help out with restoring Rangitoto baches. Right: Andy Heyward's Rangitoto bach.



ANDY HEYWARD LOVES THAT FEELING HE GETS WHEN he waves the last ferry away from Rangitoto Island wharf bound for nearby Auckland.

With the summit-climbing day-trippers gone, Andy and his young family feel like they've stepped through a private time-warp, back to the island's early heyday, circa 1920-30, when living conditions were primitive, but Kiwis were rich with community spirit and do-it-yourself pride.

Andy, 35, his wife and their three young children are descendants of an original owner of a weather-beaten Rangitoto bach, one of the 34 quintessentially Kiwi holiday homes still standing on the fringes of the Hauraki Gulf's iconic volcano.

Twice a year for up to a week – more if Andy had his way – they make the six-hour drive from their Hawke's Bay home to stay at their no-frills weatherboard-clad bungalow with the signature keyhole doorway and washed-up Jandals dangling from the pohutakawas.

Aside from the quirky ornamental touches – a shopping trolley also rescued from the tide overflows with every conceivable sports ball caught in nearby rocks – not a lot has changed at the bach since Andy's grandfather Goff Greene first stayed in the early 1920s.

They fish for dinner, take long walks through the maze of scoria pathways, read, play board-games and generally lose themselves in the island's many charms.

There's no electricity, no hot and cold running water, no bathroom – back yard long-drops are still de rigeur on Rangitoto – or for that matter any heating when they make their regular mid-winter stopover. But the Heywards, and the generations before them, wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's really just a step up from glorified camping; you go to bed at night when it gets dark and curl up in your sleeping bag," says Andy. "But all the people we've taken over remark at what a magical place it is. When that last ferry goes and all the tourists leave all you hear is the city buzzing away; it's really quite soothing for the soul."

"The kids love it too. There's no phone, power, shops or movies. For the first few days they're a bit lost unwinding and relaxing, but after that they're off, fishing, hunting for treasure. They really do find another side to themselves. I'm sure it's quite a different experience for my kids than it was when my parents were going. Then it was a real thriving summer community."

"But no matter how long you leave it, it's always like you were only there yesterday. There's still that sense of belonging and sentimentality. When I take my kids the neighbours will say, 'Oh, it's just like when you were little. I remember when you were naked running down the path.' It would be great for my kids to be able to take their kids and have that contact through the ages."

While Andy's mum, current bach lessee holder Jan Heyward, is alive their short-term tenure is safe. In 1990 a final renewal of leases for the surviving 34 baches was made for a further 33 years, or on the death of the lessee. Beyond that no one can really be sure whether another Heyward generation will share the same experience.



Opening pages: A typical Rangitoto bach. Left: Andy Heyward's grandparents Margaret and Goff Greene, enjoying the Rangitoto sunshine.

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The original 140 baches were an anomaly when first built – mostly from recycled materials – and many of the existing 34 remain an irregularity today: private dwellings on public land.

The conflict started when the original governing body, a cash-strapped Devonport Domain Board, consented first to letting camp sites on Rangitoto in 1911 – at two pounds a year – and seven years later, leases to build.

It took the Crown until 1937 to put a stop to any further development and take back some semblance of control, issuing the first in a succession of periodic leases to bach owners in the island's three settlements, at the wharf, Beacon End in the north-west corner and Islington Bay to the east.

Strict conditions were later imposed – no additions or alterations, no sale, exchange or rent and demolition would be mandatory on the death of the lessee. As a result dozens of cherished family heirlooms and historic examples of Kiwi ingenuity were literally torched to the rock through the 1970s and 80s.

Remnants are still scattered around the jagged coastline; chimneys, demolition rubble, long idle boat-slips, and garden steps that lead to nowhere, ghostly reminders of the golden age when scores of families left the city stress behind to swim, boat, fish, picnic and socialise.

For Andy's 90-something grandfather Goff, who also bought bach 22 [Little Coogee] for his grandmother in 1931, the scars run deep; he hasn't returned to Rangitoto now for 40 years, partly in sympathy for the plight of his neighbours, and partly because the community has never felt the same.

Rangitoto's new caretaker, the Department of Conservation, put a stop to further destruction in 1990 and seven years later the three bach communities were registered as historic areas by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust.



The Rangitoto Island Historic Conservation Trust was formed the same year to oversee the day-to-day management and restoration duties of a select few baches.

Remaining families whose bach lease holders had died were given their final marching orders in 2004, after a three year reprieve as caretakers. But later that year they dug their collective toes in, says Stephen Penk, associate Dean of Law at Auckland University and proud flag-bearer to a five-generation link to bach 118 at Islington Bay.

They rallied to form lobby group Rangitoto Island Bach Community Association (RIBCA), and fought the eviction order in the High Court in 2006, successfully arguing the Minister Conservation hadn't taken into account a Hauraki Gulf and Marine Park Act dictum to preserve and enhance the community.

"You can't do either [preserve or enhance] if your bach is demolished," says Stephen, RIBCA's vice-president and Rangitoto regular since he was photographed there as a two-year-old in 1955. "We're still waiting for a fresh decision but it has given us some hope for continued access and an incentive for restoration. Hopefully we can strike some kind of deal with DOC for occupation with some right of access by the public."

Meanwhile, Stephen, who has five adult sons and two grandchildren, escapes to Hazel (their basic blue and white inland hideaway) at least once a month for one or two days to recharge the batteries.

Stephen admits the bach was "literally coming apart at the seams", but since their High Court 'victory', there has been a flurry of restoration work in the last two years.

If the day comes that he can no longer stay, or Hazel is demolished, Stephen says inevitably there'd be regret, but countered by a lifetime of happy memories. "Growing up there taught us respect for the environment, and the spirit of co-operation it fosters shaped the way we developed as a family," says Stephen.

Heritage consultant Susan Yoffe is a key player in ensuring Rangitoto's Kiwiana lives on. She wrote a widely read and respected thesis on the Rangitoto communities and their unique place in New Zealand's history, a detailed study many insiders credit as a community lifesaver.

Susan is now a member of the Trust, formed in 1997, charged with restoring baches as they become available. Just how many that will end up being restored depends on time, money and volunteers. Susan says six would be a manageable number. But progress is slow.

The Trust's first project – bach 38 near the Rangitoto Wharf – was finished in 2005 after four years and an estimated 26,000 volunteer hours. It's now a showpiece Trust museum piece and a nominee for a UNESCO Cultural Heritage Award to be announced in September, 2008.

"We just want them [the other baches] not to be pulled down and take care of them as they become available," says Susan. "We never wanted to interfere with the legal process. That's where RIBCA comes in."

Once a fortnight – make that monthly during the dead of winter – volunteers gather to work on the next trust salvage, with funding from sponsor AMP.



Opposite page:  
Andy's family bach.  
Left: Joan and Uma  
painting the tennis  
court, 1944. Below:  
Peter Woolnough,  
John White, Alan  
Cutler, Audrey  
playing tennis 1945.

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When ALIVE arrives for a visit, only a loyal handful has sacrificed their Saturday of sport and family time but enthusiasm is high as we make the bone-crunching drive east across the scoria from Rangitoto Wharf to Islington Bay in the DOC-supplied 4WD.

They're here to spruce up a once majestic but now slightly worse-for-wear two-bedroom period bungalow – bach 114 in trust-speak – which sits next to the community's one-time social hub, the multi-purpose hall and adjoining tennis courts.

It's one of only 13 of the original 33 in Islington Bay to survive the ravages of time and Rangitoto's darkest period. Two of today's volunteers, the group's only DOC-sanctioned drivers John White and Peter Woolnough, have no family connection with the bach in question, or in fact Rangitoto at all. But sisters Barbara Turner and Christine Cutler – her builder husband Alan is also along to lend a hand – are granddaughters of the bach's 1930s owner Herbie Culpan, who also owned another site in the same area.

Barbara and Christine (the youngest at 54 years old), have been staying in the surviving bare-basics cottage with family and friends for as long as they can remember, and still regularly take the Reubens' water-taxi from Auckland on Friday nights to stay overnight on holiday weekends and summer breaks.

The self-sufficient, community lifestyle that Rangi-life celebrates has shaped their adventurous, confident personalities and etched memories that can never be erased by court action or a rampant caretaker's torch.

In a half-hour stroll around the well-trodden shell-covered paths of their youth, they take us back to their halcyon days, the 1950s and 60s. They point out their favourite swimming hole between Rangitoto and neighbouring Motutapu Island, the wharf where they'd fish for the family cat's dinner, their go-home-stay-home spots, and to the west, the rocks where shipwrecks offered endless hours of hide-and-seek fun. You made your own entertainment in those days, and life, says Christine and Barbara, was richer for it.

"We really did have the most wonderful times over here," adds Christine, a BNZ clients' funds officer, who trained for countless Auckland swimming medals each summer in Rangi's waters. "It was the best kind of life growing up. It hardened you up a bit. We used to have all our friends lining up in the holidays to come over with us."

It's just a shame, say the sisters, that their mum Audrey can't still be around to see yet another generation fanning the community spirit she helped light so many years earlier. Audrey, the bach leaseholder from 1955, died in 1988 of a brain aneurism.

Engaged twice to two different Rangitoto-based U.S. military men – she later married the sisters' Kiwi father Vic – Audrey was the life and soul of Islington Bay (or just Izzy Bay to the locals) for Christine, Barbara and older sister Cheryl growing up.

Although without any formal medical training, Audrey was the unofficial nurse of the community, forever yanking errant fishing hooks from fingers and patching up scoria scalds.

"She always made sure we delivered extra fish to the other baches – she

Below: Young boys Peter and Rey playfighting. Right: Harry and Mike, two Rangitoto-based American soldiers.



WE THREE TEEN GIRLS WEREN'T ALLOWED OUT UNTIL WE'D *done the dishes,* SO ALL THE BOYS WOULD COME OVER AND *do the dishes for us*

really was the most special person," says Barbara. "She would have loved to have seen us back here using it [the bach]. This place was her pride and joy."

Thanks to AMP funding for materials, and hours of voluntary work, the family holiday home is slowly but surely being restored to its former glory.

Walls have been rebuilt, repiling done and a new roof installed in April 2007. The decaying backyard windmill, which once supplied electricity for lighting, is also earmarked for a facelift. Inside, there is an original working fireplace – an old Electrolux kerosene-fuelled fridge that still has everyone stumped – and Christine is forever trawling Trade Me for period pieces to recapture the look of the original furniture, much of it supplied by the American soldiers stationed on Rangitoto during WWII.

On the wall hangs a black and white aerial photo of a bustling 1959 Islington Bay, and you can still see the colour-shading of a giant living room mirror, which held pride of place for female guests as they preened themselves before heading out for a stroll down Lover's Lane or a knees-up at the hall.

"We three teen girls weren't allowed out until we'd done the dishes, so all the boys would come over and do the dishes for us – we had it made," laughs Christine.

When the Trust refurbishments are finished – Susan hopes by this summer – the public will also be able to stay for a nominal fee, although the logistics are still being ironed out. Meanwhile, the sisters only hope that their unofficial caretaker status of bach 114 continues and they too get to make more memories for years to come.

"It's just so tranquil here," says Barbara during a working bee breather. "Where can you go now without cars cruising past? The peace and quiet here is unsurpassed. You just can't find a place anywhere like this. We feel privileged to be here and feel lucky to have had it for as long as we have." ■



Left: A boat shed at Islington Bay. Above: Andy Heyward at age three racing for the finish line. Right: Audrey ready for an island party.



Below left: Bob Brown and Goff Greene with a haul of snapper. Below right: The spot where Rangitoto Island and Motutapu Island meet.

