



Picture: HAMISH WHITE

LIFE'S A BEACH: Koitiata fire chief Peter Bamford approaches the local ford on a journey home from the nearby beach

## Thumbs up for ford

A FORD across a lagoon, built last September by Koitiata locals and users of the nearby beach, has "transformed" the coastal settlement west of Turakina.

That's the view of Koitiata residents' committee chairman Peter Smith.

Mr Smith said reference to a transformation might "sound a bit dramatic" but locals estimate "more visitors this summer than the past two years put together".

Besides greater popularity among visitors evident at the beach and at Koitiata's camping ground, Mr Smith said residents have benefited as well, with better access for fishing and ocean-side walks.

By HAMISH WHITE

He said the lagoon, created when the Turakina River carved a new outlet to the sea several years ago, is presently at winter levels owing to unseasonal rain.

Inside its sand-bagged borders the ford, as expected, is easily crossed by foot, 4WD or tractor.

On the subject of whether Koitiata is poised for commercial development in the wake of its new-found ability to draw bigger summer-time crowds, Mr Smith said the topic has long been a bone of not-too-serious contention.

"There's always been a bit of debate down here on whether we should open it up or keep it quiet

and secret and I think the 'quiet and secret' ones over-ride everyone else — we're just happy with the way it is," he said.

Perhaps to deflect undue interest in the commercial potential of Koitiata, Mr Smith sounded a note of caution for would-be builders of a mini Luna Park or drive-through Dive World.

"The other thing that's happening is we're losing our beach," he said.

"The westerlies combined with very high tides have crashed our beach away.

"It'll be interesting to see what happens in the next few years as to whether the lagoon becomes tidal."

# Koitiata lagoon causeway proves its worth

By Colin Rowatt

"Sands Alive," a Department of Conservation initiative to raise public awareness of and develop community involvement in issues affecting our coastline, has created a win-win situation at the Turakina beachside settlement of Koitiata.

The community has achieved its aim of building a causeway across the lagoon between the village and the beach while at the same time protecting several rare and endangered plant and bird species from possible destruction.

The relationship between DoC and Koitiata residents was not always friendly and co-operative but the "Sands Alive" scheme has also changed that.

More than a year ago, when the locals first proposed building the causeway to give access from the village to the beach, DoC and other environmental agencies initially viewed the project as interfering with nature.

The lagoon was created when the flood-swollen Turakina River broke through the coastal dune to carve a direct course to the sea.

While it suited many species of aquatic birds who quickly made the lagoon their home it made access to the beach difficult for Koitiata residents and visitors.

However, those with tractors and four-wheel drive vehicles simply ploughed through the wetland at the lagoon's edge, putting that environment under serious threat and



PHOTO: K WEIS-DOC

Causeway crusaders Peter Fraser (Care Group), Stephen Sammons (DoC) and Peter Simpson (Care Group) about to cross the Koitiata lagoon.

creating even more problems.

Koitiata residents saw the causeway plan as the lesser of two evils but for a long time were unable to persuade the conservationists to that point of view.

The "Sands Alive" scheme, leading to the formation of the Koitiata Coastal Care Group, eventually removed the impasse.

DoC achieved the protection it sought and the residents, with financial and practical help from a variety of sources, got their causeway.

It has already proved its worth this summer with the settlement and its beach attracting many more visitors than in recent years because of the

improved beach access.

At the same time DoC's aims are being met. Damage to wetlands at the edge of the lagoon has been minimised and bird and plant life in other areas of the lagoon is also no longer being threatened by people and machinery churning up their habitats.

DoC Wanganui spokesman Kirby Weis says the Koitiata project was a good example of "a can-do attitude and Kiwi ingenuity making a difference."

"Thanks to the group's efforts the public now has easy access through wetland, across the lagoon to the beach with minimal damage to the environment," Mr Weis said.



PHOTO: COLIN DOGLE-DOC

Sebarea ovata, one of the wetland plants found near the Koitiata lagoon.



PHOTO: KIRBY WEIS-DOC

The Koitiata causeway providing environmentally safe access to the beach.



# Kiwi ingenuity for Koitiata coast



**Peter Fraser and Peter Simpson from Care Group and Stephen Sammons from DoC, try out the new causeway.**

This little story could be the things that movies are made of a small coastal community achieving big results in saving a fragile coastal environment.

It all started with a Department of Conservation initiative called "Sands Alive", a programme to raise public awareness of coastal issues and how communities can help. As a result, there are now five Coast Care Groups between Foxton and Waitotara.

One of them is at Koitiata, a small beach settlement, west of Turakina where at the beginning of 2001, DOC organised a very successful public meeting.

From this meeting the community formalised their efforts and the Koitiata Coast Care Group was born.

Koitiata had a long running problem of sand, lagoon and wetland destruction as a result of people trying various approaches to get onto the Turakina beach.

The sand dunes, lagoon and wetland are important as feeding and roosting area for rare and threatened fernbird, banded dotterel, Caspian tern, black fronted dotterel, white fronted tern, the migrating godwit and a variety of other waterfowl.

These areas have also plant records for the endangered and rare Turakina daphne, sand daphne, sneeze weed, pingao,

dwarf sedge, dwarf Mazus, sand iris and Sebaea.

The Koitiata Coast Care Group proposed the idea of making a causeway across an existing muddy path through the wetland and then to construct a ford across the lagoon.

They received monetary pledges from locals and pub charities, expertise from horizons.mw and Bob Majors, a private landowner

donated all the sand needed to ensure the dunes were not damaged.

Thanks to the group's efforts the public now has easy access through the wetland, across the lagoon and has an established access onto and off the beach to minimise damage to the environment.

Koitiata is an example of a can-do attitude and kiwi ingenuity making a difference.



# Let's go to the beach

**W**ITH winter looming, the next few weekends may provide about the last chance to head for the beach and blow the cobwebs away.

Out Turakina way, I reckon the honours better go to the little hamlet of Koitiata. Whether you want to call this Turakina Beach or Koitiata Beach, either way it is well worth a visit ... provided of course that there's no southerly.

To get there, head slightly west of Turakina along Highway 3, then follow the signpost route south along Turakina Beach Road all the way into Koitiata. Access to the beach is well

**out  
there  
and  
cockroft**



signposted, but the warning about it four-wheel-drive only should be taken seriously.

Cross the water-covered causeway, paying careful attention to stay inside the marker pegs (else you'll risk straying into deep water), and climb out over the dune to the

beach. Please heed all the signs out this way, and stay off the dunes themselves. They are quite fragile.

I tend to prefer the beach to the left (or east), since you can motor along for quite a few kilometres to find that idyllic fishing, barbecue stop or secluded little hideaway.

The renowned Santoft Forest is inland, while the air force's old Raumai bombing range limits progress to the south.

If you've got a GPS, try to find the wreck of the Fusilier, which sank around here in 1884. Its map coordinates are 2697200E, 6111715N in the New Zealand Map Grid format. For those without modern sat-nav

aids, stop when you've clocked 8.5kms from Koitiata.

I've tried several times to find it, without success. But you never tell on these beaches, as wind and tide serve to shift the sand about quite considerably over a relatively short time.

Keep an eye out for seals and do watch for fishing lines draped across the sand, plus any kids that may be out playing while dad does the fishing.

In forthcoming columns, I'll focus on some of the excellent rivers the Manawatu has to offer, all waiting to be explored.

Safe driving and have fun.

Andy

