

Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

AUTUMN 2024

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

•	Official	р5
	clean up	

- Autumnal pδ thoughts
- Mahoe p9
- A pink-footed p10 invader
- Life after pl2 death

Editorial

In this autumn edition we reflect on the many and various harvests that the creek has produced this season. Not just the weeds! Also, satisfaction, exciting finds, art projects, camaraderie and mountains of mulch.

You will be pleased to see that Auckland Council's contractors have been busy clearing the debris from last year's deluge and converting the dead trees into nourishment for this coming planting season.

We also highlight māhoe, with its delightful purple berries, and a not so delightful pink-footed invader - some things to look out for on your autumn rambles by our precious awa.

Gina Hefferan, Editor



Photo (above): Beca team with their harvest of weeds

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Volunteers continue to be our 'heroes'

By Wendy John

Where would Te Auaunga be without our volunteers? Certainly not where it is today! The amount of time and effort they put in to helping to restore our precious awa is amazing!

With the change of seasons and slightly cooler temperatures, the rate of growth of weeds is only just starting to slow down. So, we've been busy these past few months trying to keep up with them – successfully in some areas, and not quite so in others. As per usual, the key weeds we have been focussing on are bindweed (I swear you could watch it grow!); nightshade – woolly and black (especially in the autumn),



Photo (above): Monthly Working Bee team

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moth plant – just when we thought we were getting on top of it, it keeps turning up, especially in lightwells; blue morning glory, madeira vine – which was spread during last year's flooding, so is popping up in places we haven't seen it before – grrr!!!; palm grass – spreading 'beautifully' along the floodplain!! – and a multitude of others.

And, in April we had an excellent turnout, with some new faces, and some 'returnees'. We worked in one of the Mayor's Million Trees 2022 planting areas – the growth has been astounding. We are so lucky to have rich volcanic soil in some of our planting areas – and it definitely gives good results.



Photo (above): More delicious home baking for the workers

Photo (above): Eco-stacking team after a hard morning's work

Monthly Working Bees – Our monthly working bees (first Sunday of the month) have been going great, with good numbers of volunteers. Over the past three months we've been focussing on looking after the various young plantings in the south-west end of Harbutt Reserve. And, as per usual for this time of the year, we've mainly been saving the plants from being smothered / overtopped with bindweed and prickly oxtongue. The volunteers also hauled out a heap of old rubbish from down the bank on one occasion – little bit by little bit!

In March we were joined by Teresa and a small group from the Conservation Volunteers Migrant programme, who braved the showers to help the rest of the crew with their mahi.

Friday Working Bees – It's wonderful having such an energetic and committed team of volunteers for our Friday working bees. Some of them even turned up on Easter Friday! These past weeks we've been busy working across a range of sites. They have included one of our archaeological sites – clearing weeds from around the remains of some old drystone walls that date back to the days when Harbutt Reserve was farmed by the Woodward whanau; parts of our 'rock forest' – in readiness for more infill planting this winter; and one of our 'oak forest' areas.



Photo (above): Monthly Working Bee with CVNZ volunteers



Photo (above): Friday volunteers braving the storm

An Exciting Find

By Gina Hefferan

Check out this treasure! In amongst the headhigh weeds that our enthusiastic volunteers were clearing we discovered this gem – a tiny rewarewa (*Knightia excelsa*) seedling. One that we had not planted! One of our Committee members, Adrienne Stanton, fortunately spotted it and realised its significance.

The mark of a successful native forest regeneration project is to create the conditions that allow the forest to start to regenerate itself, eventually becoming self-sustaining. Here we have more proof that this is already starting to happen at Te Auaunga. The area in which we discovered this wee gem was planted only two years ago and yet here it was – a self-sown native, of a species that may eventually become part of the forest canopy. A gift, glorious in itself, but imparting satisfaction out of all proportion to its size.

We will keep you informed of its progress.



Photo (above): Rewarewa seedling

Te Auaunga Partner Community Group Activities

By Wendy John

A Rocha – We had a record turnout with A Rocha Aotearoa recently, with 26 volunteers of all ages, cultures and backgrounds mucking in to do a top-up of weed control at one of their planting sites in Harbutt Reserve. Their commitment to continuing to care for papatuanuku and our awa is greatly appreciated. And, thanks to Sarah for 'feeding the masses' with another delicious lunch.

Oakley Loop Group (Methuen Road) – It was great to get back onto the 'loop' site again. And to have some new people join us. These working bees are always such a lovely occasion with the local families and friends, with a mix of hard mahi and social time over a 'cuppa'. If you are in Alan Wood Reserve, you can check out the site from across the creek, on the 'loop walk' just upstream from the Motor Camp. And, if you live in the area and are interested in joining the group, let us know.



Photo (above): A Rocha volunteers



Photo (above): Oakley Loop Group volunteers

Corporates and Beyond Volunteers

By Wendy John

Beca – A team from Beca joined our Friday team in March. Regular and corporate volunteers are always a good mix, with lots of work getting done, and it also adds value for both parties.



Photo (above): Beca group with Friday team

DLA Piper – Volunteers from DLA Piper were high energy and hardworking. They did a wonderful job of removing a heap of black nightshade and kikuyu on their recent visit with us. And the icing on the cake was a history lesson from one of them who has family connections with the Woodward whanau, who used to farm the land.



Photo (above): DLA Piper volunteers

Southbase – Another team from Southbase headed along from the work site (Mason Clinic expansion build) and joined us in March, to continue clearing some of the post-storm debris and trees that had died on the floodplain in the lower creek. This is definitely a work in progress!



Photo (above): Southbase group

Xero – another joint effort, with Xero and our regular Friday team resulted in a very productive morning.



Photo (above): Xero group with Friday team

Outreach Co-ordinator's Report

By Sandra Maclean

We have made big wins at the Waterview Heritage Area through the last few months. Plexure sent out a champion corporate team of 19 volunteers who ploughed through the bindweed and ferreted out lots of madeira vine tubers. We have had ongoing support from international teams courtesy of Sustainable Coastlines, and Conservation Volunteers New Zealand are booked in for upcoming Tuesday mornings with their New Migrant group.

Our volunteers are looking forward to planting up some new areas along the tidal reaches – including an area where there is a monoculture of mature whau trees that are not long for this world, being fast growing but short-lived. We need to get something planted underneath them to secure the banks and create more diversity. In the short term we will be focussing on controlling the white poplar which is suckering heavily, and having another hit on the blue morning glory which is taking off again and getting into the canopy of our natives. We've got a couple of corporate teams lined up to help our regular volunteers move things along quickly on those fronts.

Moth plant should be harder to find in Waterview and along Blockhouse Bay and New North Roads with these areas having successive control visits.

At Odyssey House's premises on the opposite side of the awa from Alan Wood Reserve, we have carried on our fortnightly restoration sessions. When I first visited the site two years ago I thought it was enormous – and it is big, holding 200m of riverbank – but partly it was just really hard to move through because it was so dense with honeysuckle, jasmine and other exotic vines. The site is much more



Photo (above): CVNZ new migrant group at WHA

navigable now and looks great following lots of weed control and two seasons of planting. We have lots more areas still to tackle but with funding from the Whau Local Board via the Whau Wildlink, volunteer work will be supported with some contractor assistance, and we can keep on top of what we have achieved and tackle new parts of the site.

Official Post Storm Clean Up Continues

By Wendy John

Whoa! A lot has happened since our last newsletter. The arborists have been busy and the helicopters buzzing! It took a week of hard mahi, but all of the broken infrastructure / bridges and dead / fallen trees are gone. It was a slick operation, with the arborist team spending two days preparing everything for lifting out; and then one and a half days with the helicopter doing the lifts – sometimes with

2-minute turn arounds. There were over 200 lifts of approx 800kg each. And, as a bonus we now have some very large piles of mulch to use in our plantings, everything else was taken off site. Great work everyone. Now we wait for the Council to decide what remedial work will be done with regards to opening up the walkway. Patience is the name of the game!



Photo (above): Helicopter in action



Photo (above): Debris from the deluge

New Volunteers

By Wendy John

Water Monitoring on the Awa – New volunteers take up the helm at the St Judes Scouts Den site. Thanks to Clare Brown and whanau for carrying out the water monitoring at the den these past five plus years. And welcome to our new team – Verity Todd and Anna Quirke and their families.

Predator Control – We are thrilled to report that we now have some new volunteers to fill in the gaps in our predator control teams. Welcome to Nicola, Jude and Reo. It's great to have you on board.

And we've just finished the autumn rodent baiting pulse over five weeks. Hopefully, we have knocked the numbers back, at least for a bit.



Photo (above): Rodent Baiting Team

Annual Archaeological Assessment

By Wendy John

The reserve land in the lower reaches of Te Auaunga – Oakley Creek is both a *Significant Ecological* Area and a *Significant Archaeological* Landscape. Thus, under Pouhere Taonga – Heritage NZ, we are required to have our proposed planting sites assessed by a qualified archaeologist each year. An invitation is required to be extended to local iwi, as part of our Cultural Monitoring protocol. This year our local archaeologist, Brent Druskovich and I were joined by a representative from Te Kawerau ā Maki, Mihi McMahon, and Auckland Council senior ecologist, Sarah Gibbs.

If you are interested in knowing where the archaeological sites might be near you – check this link – https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/auckland-plan/Pages/interactive-map.aspx?ItemId=2&prev=The%20hap



Photo (above): Archaeological Assessment



Photo (above): Archaeological sites on Oakley Creek

University of Auckland geography students using the awa for research

By Wendy John

I joined a team of university students in Walmsley Park who were doing water flow monitoring as part of their studies. There wasn't much of a flow that far up the awa. But it was great to be able to give them some background on the creek, the history, geology, and the work that has been happening over the past 20 years.



Photo (above): University of Auckland geography students at the creek

Walking Te Auaunga - Oakley Creek

By Xin Cheng and Rachel Ruckstuhl-Mann

Walking Te Auaunga was a collaborative offering from Xin Cheng, Adam Ben-Dror and Rachel Ruckstuhl-Mann, where anyone was invited to relate with Te Auaunga – Oakley Creek through practices of walking, resourcefulness, embodiment, care, deep listening, play and reciprocity.

To prepare for the two public walks, we walked along the creek over the summer. We gathered windfalls: willow, birch, harakeke, loquat, cow parsley. We dyed fabrics, sourced from local op shops, and turned them into flags and pūriri moth capes. We found fallen branches to whittle, dried tī kōuka leaves to shred and make into balls and trivets; resin to smell; charcoal, clay and bark to draw with; stones and driftwood from the river-mouth.

We set up a picnic blanket beside Wesley Community Market, and asked people – What do you know about Oakley Creek?

Then, over two mornings in March, a surprising array of old and new friends came, from up and down the creek, and beyond.

Our first public walk took place starting at the Wesley Community Market, from where we wandered past and with the restored area of Te Auaunga after Sandringham Road. We listened, rested and exchanged körero and kai under the fig tree at Walmsley Park. Eleven people, plus one dog, joined us for our hīkoi, bringing contributions of food, and their hands to carry flags.

On the second walk, we went from Brydon Place Reserve to Alan Wood Reserve. We were wandering, collecting (weeds, rubbish, treasures), conversing, whittling, picnicking, playing, wondering, and opening up space for creative being in relation to Te Auaunga. The rain came too, and the tōtara tree sheltered us. Then it was sunny again. We gave our thanks to Te Auaunga and took the human-made rubbish out for disposing of appropriately.

Walking Te Auaunga Oakley Creek was a part of Neighbours Day and Ecofest 2024, supported by Foundation North and CNZ.



Photo (above): Walking Te Auaunga with a puriri moth (Adam Ben-Dror)



Photo (above): Weaving art on Te Auaunga (Adam Ben-Dror)

Autumn - a Time of Harvest

By Marin Adams

Keats, a famous English poet, described autumn as the "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness". It is a phrase familiar to many with European heritage. Autumn also featured the Harvest Festival, a thanksgiving ceremony that was borrowed from Celtic tradition. Western civilization had four clearly defined seasons. Each had its own name. There were twelve months based on the movement of the sun, and clocks whose digits gave a precision to the measurement of time, each day and night.

Marking the time and seasonal patterns was very different in Te Moananui-a-Kiwa. The phases of the moon and the movement of the stars across the heavens, provided guidance especially for the best time to plant, harvest and go hunting or fishing. Each day of the lunar cycle had its own name so timing could be precise for the production and gathering of food.

In Te Ao Māori, ngahuru is the name given to the tau (season) when crops are lifted and then stored for the coming winter, takurua. When Matariki becomes visible on the eastern horizon, it marks the Māori New Year in the dead of winter. Then comes kōanga, the digging season, and finally summer, raumati.

If a specific time needed to be communicated, Māori could refer to the state of the tide, the flowering of a particular tree, the return of the cuckoos or the sprouting of fern root crops. Time was tied to events, not the technology of a clock.

Today in Tāmaki Makaurau, our food is usually purchased from a supermarket, with preservatives to prolong the shelf life of goods. Goods often come from the harvests of another hemisphere with different seasonal rhythms. People gathering food today are more likely to consider traffic conditions than the phase of the moon.

Volunteering for Ngā Ringa o Te Auaunga, (Friends of Oakley Creek) gives an opportunity to come close to the age-old rhythms of nature.



Photo (above): Rock forest weeding



Photo (above): A bountiful autumn harvest of weeds

There will be working bees focused on planting in winter and spring, after contractors have prepared the site and the soil has been softened by rain. Mulch is then spread and where weeds have invaded, volunteers spend much time bending down to release the growing seedlings during summer and autumn. When the berries ripen on the trees at the end of summer, they are collected for propagation in our nursery. Whilst working, people hear seasonal changes in the song of the tui, the call of the shining cuckoo, and see the delicate beauty of fungi, ferns and tiny insects.

You may wonder about the harvest of Ngā Ringa o Te Auaunga. There is certainly no snaring of birds, trapping of eels, gathering of fernroot and berries. I suggest our harvest is building connections between people who belong to the diverse communities along our awa, beautifying the walkway with a new mural, protecting the manu from rats, keeping the environment clean, being aware of the quality of the water in the awa and restoring a corridor of bush that stretches from the Waitematā to the Manukau. A very bountiful harvest indeed.

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https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-BesTime-t1-body-d1-d10. html#:~:text=Summer%20and%20winter%20are%20personified,by%20 Te%20Ra%2C%20the%20sun.

https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/discover-collections/read-watch-play/maori/matariki-maori-new-year/nights-maramataka-maori-luna

https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/22-12-2017/tamanuitera-the-sun-and-his-two-wives

Future Future music festival

By Wendy John

A number of the parks along the awa – Alan Wood, Harbutt and Phyllis, were the venue for a music festival over the summer. It was so beautiful to have music ringing out over the land, and to see our open spaces full of people enjoying themselves. And, although, unfortunately, there was no mention of Te Auaunga, a few of us did spend some time wandering around and chatting to folk about the awa and the work we are doing.



Photo (above): Future Future Music Festival

Māhoc

By Helen Mellsop

Māhoe is not a tree that stands out or impresses with its beautiful form or tall stature. You will, though, have noticed the penetrating sweet smell of the flowers in summer and the delicate tracery of its skeleton leaves on the ground. Its latin name – *Melicytus ramiflorus* – roughly translates as 'branch-flowering honey cave'!

Māhoe is everywhere along our creek and across Auckland, in coastal and lowland forest and alongside streams and rivers. It makes a great nurse species, as it grows well in open



Photo (above): The whitey wood of the māhoe trunk (Steven Schwartzman)



Photo (above): Māhoe skeleton leaf (J. Sullivan)

ground and matures rapidly to provide shade and leaf litter, to nurture other plants.

It can grow up to 10m or more. The trees often have soft white bark and are covered in white lichen – hence its other name whitey wood. Despite their strong scent māhoe flowers are small, greenish cream and inconspicuous, sprouting along the branches. Insects, birds and geckos love the abundant nectar of the flowers. The purple-blue berries that follow can be more striking and are also a great food source for birds. In Aotearoa it is thought that blue berries evolved to attract geckos and it may be that these lizards played an important role in dispersing māhoe seed when they were still abundant.

In Te Ao Māori, māhoe is known as one of the trees that was given the secret of fire when Mahuika threw one of her fiery toenails at the trickster Maui. Rubbing a flat piece of the wood with a pointed stick of kaikomako (*Pennantia corymbosa*) was a long-standing way of producing fire before matches or flints were available. Māhoe wood can also be made into a special charcoal for the making of gunpowder.

Young māhoe leaves are edible, and even older and more bitter leaves are attractive to kererū and, unfortunately, possums. They are also the food source for larvae of the māhoe stripper moth (*Feredayia graminosa*), a beautiful mottled green moth that is on the wing between October and January. Some individual trees are semi-deciduous and will lose many of their leaves over winter, leaving a carpet of delicate pale leaf skeletons, and leading to a flush of new green growth in spring.

Thousands of years ago Ōwairaka spewed lava from its crater, blocking the path of Te Auaunga and destroying the original forest. Then there was a transformation as the māhoe tree gradually established itself on the bare boulders of basalt that lay at the foot of the mountain. Ferns, mosses and lichens grew in abundance under and alongside the māhoe, creating a verdant forest on the lava field.

Today if you look at Auckland City Council GIS maps, you will see six small patches of land along the creek, identified as Remnant Māhoe Rock Forest within Harbutt and Phyllis Reserves. Council has designated them as a "rare māhoe rock forest ecosystem type".



Photo (above): Māhoe stripper moth (Phil Bendle)



Photo (above): Māhoe fruit (Gil Roper)

It is difficult to see these sites as the land is steep and there is a canopy of invasive privet in some areas. Friends of Oakley Creek are committed to protecting and restoring this unique ecosystem.

References:

Salmon, JT. The Native Trees of New Zealand. New Zealand Plant Conservation Network – https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/melicytus-ramiflorus-subsp-ramiflorus/

The Meaning of Trees – https://meaningoftrees.com/2019/01/20/mahoe-melicytus-ramiflorus/Pest Free Kaipatiki Plant of the Month February 2022 – pfk.org.nz

A Silent Incursion by a Pink-footed Invader

By Marin Adams

Tradescantia or Wandering Willy, as it was nicknamed, was the weed by the creek that I used to hate. How to stop it invading the shady areas under our trees, stopping any undergrowth of native origin? If you left the tiniest bit of root in the ground, off it would go again. It spread relentlessly. I was told hens loved it; but our Big Reds did not give it a single glance. They preferred the muehlenbeckia that scrambled over their fence, thank you.

Over the last five years another invader has appeared on our creek side. It is more water loving than shade loving. It has the same capacity to spread as *Tradescantia* but is far more robust, creating a thick carpet of foliage over the surface of the creek and the surrounding stream side in summer. *Tradescantia* rooted on the surface of the soil, but alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) tunnels down to below the depth of a spade. It is jointed like *Tradescantia* so that it is tricky trying to pull it out. You get some of the root then a week later, there is quick regrowth of the bit you left behind. In the photo below, of a small plant, the root is 26 cm long.

Where did alligator weed come from? South America. It was introduced to Northland in the 1880s / 1890s.

What does it look like? The stems are hollow and buoyant; leaves are green, hairless, waxy, with a conspicuous midrib $(4 \times 10 \text{cm long})$. The flowers resemble those of white clover but are smaller and each cluster is produced on a long stalk.

Why is alligator weed regarded as a problem? It alters the aquatic habitat adversely, affecting our native fish species and invertebrates as well as reducing native plant cover and diversity in water body margins.

Most important of all, how do we get rid of alligator weed? New infestations of the weed can be physically removed if they are detected early, when the infested area is small.

Herbicides are the most effective control tools in cases where alligator weed has spread across a large area. However, these need to be used with care around waterways, and using Auckland Council guidelines – see reference below. Auckland Council contractors have used herbicides to reduce alligator weed on Te Auaunga.

Biocontrol agents such as alligator weed flea beetle (*Agasicles hy-grophila*) and alligator weed stem borer (*Arcola malloi*) reduce but do not eradicate alligator weed. Auckland Council have introduced the beetle to Te Auaunqa.



Photo (above): Those pink roots thriving in boggy ground beside the awa (Marin Adams)



Photo (above): Alligator weed in bloom (Tiakitamakimakaurau website)



Photo (above): Such a long root for such a small plant (Marin Adams)

I spoke to Dr Imogen Bassett, the Auckland City Council Principal Advisor on Biosecurity. For her PhD, she explored the impact of alligator weed in native ecosystems. Her advice to Friends of Oakley Creek is to be vigilant when working on the creek and to physically remove any plants that are spotted. Plants that are removed should not be composted. They are best put in a tightly closed black plastic bag to decompose. As yet there is no magic remedy for ridding the creek of the pink footed invader.

References:

https://www.nrc.govt.nz/environment/weed-and-pest-control/pest-control-hub/?pwsystem=true&pwid=2

https://niwa.co.nz/freshwater/freshwater-and-estuaries-update/freshwater-update-87-june-2022/optimising-aquatic-alligator-weed-management#:~:text=New%20infestations%20of%20alligator%20 weed,hazardous%20for%20physical%20weed%20removal.

https://www.tiakitamakimakaurau.nz/protect-and-restore-our-environment/pests-in-auckland/pest-search/altphi/

Seasonal gallery

One of the highlights of autumn are its fruits. The berries of the kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) are beautiful, varying in colour from orange to red, with a seed at the top. Apparently, they are also delicious, but kahikatea being one of our taller trees and not known for its low branches, I've never actually tried them myself /[Editor]. Tui and kereru love them.

Other sightings on the creek include poroporo (*Solanum aviculare*), koromiko (*Veronica salicifolia*) and kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*) in flower, and lots of berries on the nikau palms (*Rhopalostylis sapida*).



Photo (above): Kahikatea fruit and seeds



Photo (above): From left to right, clockwise: poroporo (Solanum aviculare); koromiko (Veronica salicifolia); kanuka (Kunzea ericoides); tree fern (Cyathea dealbata) establishing in a pine tree and nikau palms (Rhopalostylis sapida).

Not more on ferns ... but lichens

By Wendy John

Yes, there is life after death. Lichens are a fine example of this and can take you into a whole other world. And, maybe, in some cases they may even cause death! You will find a good number of them growing down the creek, such as this wee gem, spotted on the branches of a dead Chinese privet – possibly Black Sheet Lichen – *Parmotrema reticulatum* (to be confirmed).

For more information on lichens check out – https://teara.govt. nz/en/lichens/print and this excellent article – https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/the-microscopic-world-of-lichens/



Photo (above): Black Sheet Lichen – Parmotrema reticulatum

Weed season continues

The environment needs your help. So, we all need to do our bit to deal with some of these key environmental weeds that are a threat to our native bush. They include:

Moth plant – urgent!! Woolly nightshade Climbing asparagus Japanese Honeysuckle

For more information on how to deal with these go to https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/environ-ment/plants-animals/pests-weeds/Documents/weedcontrolmethods.pdf

Notices

Monthly Community Working Bees: First Sunday of each month – 10.00am-12.00noon.

Tuesday Working Bees: Tuesday mornings 9.30am to 12.00pm. This exciting project is looking for some more regular volunteers. For more information contact Sandra – 021 166 7647.

Friday Working Bees: Friday mornings 9.00am to 12.00pm. We work in different locations on Friday mornings, depending on the need at the time. If you're interested let us know and we'll include you in the Friday email list so that you can join us when you are free or contact Wendy – 027 232 6454.

Annual General Meeting – Monday 10th June – 7.00pm. More details to come.

Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

Chairperson:

David Bowden

Treasurer:

Matthew Hill

Secretary:

TBC



Wendy John, Adrienne Stanton, John Stevenson, Cate Ryan, Chris Brown

Newsletter Editor: Gina Hefferan



Newsletter contributions and comments are welcome – email info@oakleycreek.org.nz

Membership: We welcome more members (\$10.00) and/or donations towards the work we are doing to protect and restore our wonderful urban 'taonga' – Oakley Creek Te Auaunga. Donations over \$5.00 are tax deductible.

Contributions can be made directly; our bank account number is 38-9003-0978224-00.

You can also find us at http://oakleycreek.org.nz/ and https://www.facebook.com/OakleyCreek

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