

Adventure Group helps to plant thousands of taupatas on Maud Island

DECIDING on a venue for the Wellington Adventure Group May trip last year was made easy when Mr Brian Bell, of the Wildlife Service, asked if the group would like to assist the Service in planting taupata trees on Maud Island in Pelorous Sound, Marlborough.

FOR 25 people on Maud Island, accommodation becomes a premium. Our members were distributed between the new house, the top house (the original homestead), and the draughty woolshed.

It seems that arriving in the dark always gives you the impression of something different from what you finally see in the light of day. By 7 o'clock on the first night, a Saturday, we had spread our gear about sufficiently to be comfortable, just in time for tea.

Enormous number

Twenty thousand trees seemed an enormous number for 25 people to have to plant. Each bag, which contained about 170 plants, had to be carried on the back around to the south-west side of the island, and I would not have been surprised had anyone wondered if a week was going to be long enough to finish the planting, let alone do fencing as well.

From the first night those who slept in the woolshed were serenaded by several little blue penguins which had made their home beneath us.

With a bright and early start on Sunday morning, we set off on what was to be a routine of

By John Atkinson

carrying plants to the ridge that was to be densely covered with taupata. We must have looked like Snow White and the 25 Dwarfs with our spades over our shoulders, trudging in single file up and along the winding track.

Once we got into the rhythm of planting, the whole programme took only 2 days to complete. On the evening of the second day it was a happy singing crew that descended down to the house for another good tea, followed by games of five hundred.

The third day was a mixed bag — generally cleaning up old fallen trees and odd bits of timber and iron discarded from the old homestead over the years. Some posts were stacked and made ready for future use; it was also a chance to feel the weight of them and how heavy they were to carry.

Wednesday was a rest day, a time to clean up the quarters, for the enthusiasts to do some photography, and for the keen to go out and catch fresh fish for breakfast the next morning.

Long-term plans

That day we walked around the island with the Wildlife Service officers, which gave us the chance to hear about long-term plans for wildlife conservation on the island.

We were able to see how the Wildlife Service tracks some

of the kakapo on the island with the aid of tail feather transmitters. When signals are received a general indication of the whereabouts of the bird is gained.

From the summit the scene was tranquil and we all enjoyed the fine weather and view of the Sounds and the distant Kaikouras.

On the way back a quick visit was made to the gun emplacement on the northern point of the island. All that remains now is the large concrete building which once housed a gun facing out to Cook Strait.

Another battle

For the island now there is another battle to face — the fight to prevent extinction of some of our rarest birds, the native snail which is found on the island, and the unique little native frog. The soldiers this time are the officers of the Wildlife Service, whose surveillance and dedicated work must continue to give endangered wildlife a chance of survival.

The remaining days of the stay were spent in fencing so that the sheep on the island can be grazed without disturbance to any of the areas being managed for the wildlife.

We left the island with the comforting thought that the uncomfortable nights, the heavy loads, and the long days had been well worth enduring to help the Service in its development programme of the island.