

Climbing the Golden Stairs

Pawarenga, North Hokianga. A remote settlement of 40 odd scattered households on the south side of the Whangape Harbour inlet, predominantly Maori and largely Roman Catholic having been served by the Mill Hill Mission fathers and taught by the Sisters of Mercy for many, many years.



The story of the Pawarenga Community Trust

Gloria Herbert — co-ordinator

It is a beautiful valley. The Warawara mountains jealously guard the last remnants of the great kauri forests that once clothed all these hills around us, long since plundered. Cold, mountain free streams still tumble down from the natural watersheds to feed into the Rotokakahi river that winds and wends its way to the tidal inlet. There are whitebait in season and good fishing all year round and an abundance of kai-moana, — if you know where to go.

It's a good place to live. Especially if you like the slower pace of life and do not mind the dusty, pot-holed miles of metal road to anywhere. For those who need to keep in touch with the outside world there is a solar-powered transmitter that has beamed in colour T.V. for 3 years now and a 5 day-a-week mail service. There is no denying however that because of its isolation, — geographic, social and ethnic; Pawarenga is largely an insular community.

Former years

There are in the valley five churches and three marae. Two of the churches, both Catholic, are still used regularly. Also the marae, each of which services different family groups of Te Uri-o-tai, the people of Pawarenga. They are an indication of former years when there were over 30 dairy farms established in the 1930's and the daily cream truck was full of cream cans from the settlement alone. Now, there are only 2.

The urban migration of the 40's and 50's has left its aftermath. A number of the houses built for those early farmers still survive occupied now by a few of our kaumatua with their mokopuna and a variety of social welfare beneficiaries mostly unemployed, the casualties of our current economic climate.

This time last year if you cared to, you could have spent a day on a trip to Pawarenga and driven slowly down through the valley to the beach at the end of the road. If it was a weekday you

might have seen a plume of smoke on the river and a group of cars on the roadside indicating the whereabouts of "wombles", at work on the County Council's clearing P.E.P. project — the only work available in Pawarenga. You would have noted the small un-modern homes too many of which need paint and repair, — the run-down marae buildings, — the fences that need fixing and the land, much of it obviously under-utilised or neglected. And you could easily have made a hasty retreat and a snap judgement of Pawarenga as a place full of no-hopers going nowhere fast.

Small signs

Come again. Two miles past the Panguru turn-off you will see a sign that certainly wasn't there last year. Slow up a little; — Pawarenga Community Workshop, — and there it is. A large modern utility building alongside the old Rotokakahi hall that has taken on the new lease of life as an office and