Porirua’s Outdoor Recreation Park

Outdoor recreation in the western hills of Porirua and Tawa

Spicer Forest
Spicer Botanical Park
Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve
Te Rahui o Rangituhi
Porirua Scenic Reserve
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1. Introduction

This development plan for an outdoor recreation park is a joint project between Porirua City Council and Wellington City Council. The councils consulted on the draft plan in 2015 and received 348 submissions. The plan was amended in places to deal with issues raised by submitters.

The park is located on land between Titahi Bay to the north and Ohariu Valley to the south and overlooks Porirua Central Business District and Tawa (see Figure 1). The park proposal was initiated by discussion on future management of Spicer Forest where pine harvesting was no longer a viable economic option, and the Porirua City Council purchase and retirement of farmland on Colonial Knob.

The park provides for leisure and unmotorised, informal outdoor recreation. Its location makes it ideal for such activities. It is close to developing urban areas with a diverse and growing population and major transport links. It connects to local, regional and national walking trails and visually and ecologically to Wellington City’s Outer Green Belt and to Porirua City’s western hills, city backdrop and coastline (see Figures 2 & 3). It is the only location in the Wellington Region that can offer mountain biking with everything from easy family loops to intermediate trail riding and downhill racing.

Activities in the park include walking, running, orienteering, on leash dog walking in some areas, horse trekking in Spicer Forest, mountain biking, experiencing native forested areas and bird life in the scenic reserves and enjoying expansive views from Colonial Knob. Decisions on types of recreation for the park and where the different activities take place are based on the ability of the landscape to absorb activities - gradient, vulnerability to erosion, visual prominence, vegetative cover, ecology, and streams.

This development plan is intended to be a guide for implementation of existing policy and the setting of future budgets and work programmes. It identifies a number of actions and capital projects which will be subject to a priority setting process, as well as to the Long Term Plan and to external funders.

The park is made up of five reserve areas, primary and secondary entrances, recreational and ecological connections and a variety of trails:

- **Spicer Botanical Park** - An arboretum that will also become the main park entrance or gateway, is a setting for events and a destination in its own right. Trails lead from Spicer Botanical Park to Spicer Forest, Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve and Te Rahui o Rangituhi (see page 9 for details).

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Spicer Forest and Broken Hill Link - A multi-use active recreation area within a pine forest behind the landfill and Tawa (see page 10 for details).

Te Rahui o Rangituhi - Retired farmland with three distinct landscape areas and a focus on mountain biking:

- Lower area - accessible with exotic and native trees (see page 11)
- Middle area - highly visible and steep with mixed exotic and native planting (see page 12)
- The summit - an undulating landscape of peaks and troughs, highpoints and expansive 360º views grazed for management (see page 13).

Porirua Scenic Reserve - a significant lowland native forest that is now rare in the region and stretches almost to Titahi Bay (see page 14).

Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve - owned and managed by the Department of Conservation (see page 14).

Entrances - main entrance, secondary entrances and entrances from neighbouring suburbs (page 15).

A variety of trails – for different users, use and difficulty, designed to avoid conflict between users with loop trails of varying distances, some separation, shared trails in places, and the easiest trails closest to park entrances (see page 16).

Recreational and ecological connections - (see pages 17 - 19).
2. Principles

Eighteen principles under six broad headings guide development and management of the park.

SUSTAINABILITY

1. The places, facilities and services we provide are environmentally and financially sustainable, well-maintained and connected for biodiversity and people.

2. Developments planned to meet local and regional needs are considered with reference to existing regional provision and scale in order to complement rather than compete with existing facilities.

We need to capitalise on our strengths. We cannot provide all things to all people. We are part of a wider Wellington region and should build on our people, facilities and natural assets.

PROTECTION

3. Recreational activities are sympathetic to the landscape and protect, ecology, natural and heritage features.

Decisions on the location of places and types of recreation are based on the ability of the landscape to absorb the activity. Recreation development will be limited in areas that are steep, visually prominent, prone to erosion and where development will have negative effects on native vegetation and habitat.

4. Biodiversity connections between places within the park and between the park and Wellington Outer Green Belt and Stuart Park through plant and animal pest control and restoration.

5. Park development, selection of routes for trails, trail construction and long-term management practices protect the park’s natural values, streams and water catchments from sediment loss.

A rigorous trail approval process, including ecological assessment, will be required before routes are approved for construction. Trails will be designed and constructed to best practice standards and will avoid riparian margins, significant vegetation and habitats, and where practicable steep erosion-prone land. Measures will be taken to prevent sediment from entering stream systems.

Reserve values will be carefully protected in Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve and Porirua Scenic Reserve. Areas to avoid will be identified, tracks will detour rather than cut or remove vegetation that is identified as important and the tree canopy will remain closed to prevent light wells and weed infestation. Tree form will be retained when seeking height clearances and structures will be considered rather than disturbing natural features and vegetation.
6. Maori heritage is recognised, highlighted and protected.

The area is important to Ngāti Toa, in particular the peaks, ridgeline and native forested areas.

7. Heritage is highlighted and protected.

Heritage includes pastoral farming on Rangituhi / Colonial Knob and reservoirs in Colonial Scenic Reserve, the water supply for Porirua Hospital.

CONNECTIONS

8. Places within the park and facilities are connected via trails so people can move from one place to another.

Connections will be improved between Spicer Forest, Spicer Botanical Park and Te Rahui o Rangituhi and through the scenic reserves.

9. The park connects to Porirua and the wider Wellington area.

Access to the park from neighbouring suburbs will be planned as a part of development in areas such as Stebbings Valley and Kenepuru, as well connections to the Outer Green Belt, Stuart Park, Titahi Bay and Whitireia Park.

10. The park is easy to find with clearly delineated routes, wayfinding along key roads, walkways and cycleways and easily identifiable park entrances.

RECREATION

11. Activities in the park cater for all ages and abilities, with a focus on family/whanau recreation.

12. Barriers to participation are avoided or minimised.

Loop walks and mountain bike trails of varying lengths and grades, easy walks and beginner mountain bike trails centred around entrances with more challenging experiences located further away. Facilities may include toilets, picnic tables, interpretive shelters, seating, wayfinding, barbecues and bike wash down areas.


Location and design of trails will minimise conflict between different users. In places, use will be separated or restricted to downhill mountain biking. When downhill trails are restricted to mountain bikers they will have no intersections with walkers. Downhill mountain biking will be separated from the 4-wheel drive track and other track users through Colonial Knob.
In the scenic reserves, trails will be designed to maintain the safety of walkers and mountain bikers. In some cases the environment will not be able to sustain a track design that is wide enough for shared two-way use. In these cases, one way mountain bike travel will be considered or routes separated.

14. The park as an educational asset.

Interpretive themes throughout the park include Spicer Botanical Park arboretum of exotic trees in the context of the neighbouring native forest of the scenic reserve, ‘exchange’ aspects of Spicer landfill with recycling/exchange of goods, streams, water treatment through reed beds in Spicer Botanical Park, modern landfill management, waster minimisation and telecommunication infrastructure.

15. Opportunities for sightseeing and development of viewpoints.

Communication towers are located on high points and views from these high points are panoramic. Now that the area is publicly accessible, the dominance of these facilities on key viewpoints is an issue, as is maintenance standards of the buildings, fences, gates and other structures associated with these communication towers.

Enhancing access to the viewpoints and improving the appearance of infrastructure is important. Views will be protected through grazing and careful location of planting on the tops.

16. Appropriate commercial concessions within the park.

These include mountain bike hire and shuttling, commercial vehicle access to Rangituhi / Colonial Knob summit for sightseeing, and food or coffee carts.

LANDFILL

17. As landfill areas are retired they are appropriately treated and integrated into the park over time.

ADVISORY GROUP

18. The Councils will set up an advisory group to assist with detailed trail and facility development planning.

Representatives will be sought from Ngati Toa and a range of users such as mountain bikers, multi-sports, walkers, horse riders, ecologists and interested members of the public. From time to time others with particular expertise will be asked to join the group.
3.1. Spicer Botanical Park - main entrance and park hub

OBJECTIVE

Spicer Botanical Park developed as the main entrance to the wider recreation park and a destination in its own right within a stream and treed landscape.

FACILITIES (see Figure 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existing</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Arboretum of exotic trees</td>
<td>• Bike skills development area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Picnic areas</td>
<td>• Shelters and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Walkways and viewpoints</td>
<td>• Increased carpark capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Walk and cycle trails leading to other areas in the park</td>
<td>• Toilets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpretation of existing water treatment through reed beds</td>
<td>• Bike-washing stations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ACTIVITIES

• Walking

• Activities associated with trail head - bike washdown etc

• Picnicking

• Bike skills development

• On leash dog exercise. No dogs on mountain bike trails.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

• Dense planting between the landfill and the park

• Management and interpretation of exotic tree arboretum

• Stream protection and management

• Removing barriers to fish passage in Mitchell Stream.
3.2. Spicer Forest and Broken Hill Link

OBJECTIVES

1. Trails within a forest of pine trees which the naturally regenerating native broadleaf forest will replace over time. For horses, walkers, runners, orienteering etc and mountain bikers.

2. Use of the Spicer access road to connect Ohariu Valley Road and Spicer Botanical Park via the Broken Hill Link trail.

FACILITIES

Existing
- Spicer access road linking Ohariu with Spicer Botanical Park
- Carparking
- Broken Hill Link trail

New
- Trails for horses, walking and mountain biking
- Information and wayfinding

ACTIVITIES

- Horse trekking
- Mountain biking along Spicer access road
- Walking, running, orienteering
- On leash dog exercise

LAND MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

- Dense planting between trails and the landfill with gaps for views of landfill activities
- Long term planting and restoration plan to replace aging pines trees with native vegetation
- Riparian planting along Ohariu Stream and horse trails located away from the stream and its tributaries to avoid sediment getting into the stream
- Management of the western side of Spicer Forest (west of Ohariu Stream) for native understorey regeneration as wind damaged pines and windthrow open up areas
- Partnership with landfill management on access, security, trail development and management of landfill smell and rubbish (particularly plastic bags) blowing onto the area

FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- Connections with Northern Wellington suburban areas, especially from Upper Stebbings Valley, Redwood Bush and Katarina Grove
- Trail links with Council reserves at 944 Ohariu Valley Road to integrate it into the park experience
- As landfill areas are retired treat them in an appropriate manner that allows for integration into the park over time e.g. contouring and treatment to allow recreational use and appropriate planting
- Once the landfill is retired, develop alternative access through the landfill area between Spicer Forest and Spicer Botanical Park.
3.3. Te Rahui o Rangituhi

OBJECTIVE

1. A whanau friendly destination for walking, mountain biking and sightseeing with a range of walking and mountain bike trails for beginners, intermediate and advanced mountain bikers.

Lower Te Rahui o Rangituhi

FACILITIES

Existing

• Vehicle and cycle access from Raiha Street and Broken Hill Road (Spicer Botanical Park)
• Spicer Link and Tumeke mountain bike trails
• 4-wheel drive track.

New

• Whanau friendly mountain bike trails within existing trees where children and beginners can develop skills
• Some new mountain bike trails (refer 4.2)
• Improved access from Raiha Street.

ACTIVITIES

• Whanau beginner and intermediate mountain biking with opportunities for children to learn and develop skills in an environment that can be enjoyed by the whole family
• On leash dog walking (no dogs on mountain bike trails).

LAND MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

• Manage silt in accordance with best practice to support outcomes of the Harbour Strategy
• Improvement of the amenity of ponds and wet gullies and their indigenous biodiversity
• Control of weeds and pest animals to facilitate natural regeneration with some additional planting of native species
• Implement planting plans (Resource Consent requirement when constructing tracks)
• Tree management to allow recreation e.g. tree crown lifting and thinning.
Middle Te Rahui o Rangituhi

FACILITIES

Existing

- The existing 4-wheel drive track to the summit maintained and used by walkers, up hill mountain bikers, limited mountain biking shuttle, and for authorised personnel to reach the communication towers (contractors, VHS club members, Porirua City council officers etc).

New

- Some mountain bike downhill trails of varying degrees of difficulty, separated from other users with no intersections with other user trails (refer 4.2).

ACTIVITIES

- Separated downhill mountain biking trails
- Walking, running, orienteering
- Sightseeing
- On leash dog walking, but no dogs on mountain bike trails

- Riding for the disabled along the 4-wheel drive track to the upper area until their likely move from Kenepuru. After that time horse riding will be restricted to booked events
- Applications invited for a commercial concession for a shuttle/4-wheel drive vehicle service along the existing access road to transport mountain bikers and sightseers to Rangituhi / Colonial Knob. This will allow visitors who would otherwise be unable to experience the expansive views from the summit.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

- Weeds and pest animals controlled to facilitate natural native species regeneration with some additional planting of native species
- Some suitable exotic species may be planted to help stabilise erosion-prone slopes
- Retire former 4-wheel drive tracks apart from the existing access road to the summit
- Implement planting plans (Resource Consent requirement when constructing tracks)
- Development of the downhill mountain bike routes must consider and reduce negative effects on erosion, existing vegetation and visibility of tracks from the valley floor and the city
- Identify and map geotechnical issues so track construction avoids areas where land instability may cause risk to users and to reduce risks of erosion.
Rangituhi / Colonial Knob Summit

FACILITIES

Existing

- Existing access road to the summit for walkers, uphill mountain biking and for authorised personnel to reach the communication towers (contractors, VHS club members, Porirua City council officers etc).

New

- Some mountain bike trails (see 4.2)
- Shelter structures that are sympathetic to the landscape and that will enhance the mountain biking and sightseeing/tourism experience
- Commercial shuttles
- Interpretation of views and natural, cultural and landscape heritage.

ACTIVITIES

- Walking
- Mountain bike trails
- Tourism and sightseeing
- Picnicking
- Managed 4-wheel drive
- Riding for the disabled along the 4-wheel drive track to the upper area until their likely move from Kenepuru. After that time horse riding will be restricted to booked events
- Grazing.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

- Views protected
- Fencing and two locked gates to control stock with recreational access on the main track
- No access for dogs through the gates to the grazed area of Rangituhi / Colonial Knob summit and dogs prohibited on mountain bike trails
- Implement planting plans (Resource Consent requirement when constructing tracks)
- Protection and restoration of sensitive wetland areas and gullies
- Weed control to allow natural revegetation and additional native planting to connect Porirua and Colonial Knob Scenic Reserves
- Improved maintenance standards of buildings, gates and fences associated with communication towers on key viewpoints
- The ridgeline is grazed to control gorse and weeds and to retain an open landscape, views and fire buffer to the Scenic Reserves.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- Public access to key viewpoints with transmission towers
- Access from the summit to Spicer Forest for mountain bikers.

Figure 5: Viewpoints map
Based on information prepared by Landmark Consulting Ltd.
3.4. Colonial Knob and Porirua Scenic Reserves

OBJECTIVES
1. Protect the scenic reserves and their ecological values, regionally threatened ecosystems and rare examples of lowland forest with podocarp species, kohekohe and tawa.

2. Allow walking and mountain biking in parts of the reserves.

NB No dogs or horses are allowed in the Scenic Reserves.

Porirua Scenic Reserve

FACILITIES

Existing
- Colonial Knob Walkway.

New
- New shared trail ascending from Raiha Street for walkers and uphill mountain biking only if practicable
- Upgraded shared loop trail between Rangituhi Crescent in Takapuwahia to the scenic reserve’s Raiha Street entrance using part of the new shared path if practicable.

ACTIVITIES
- Walking, mountain biking, and running.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION
- A walking and mountain bike trail through Porirua Scenic reserve to Titahi Bay via public land that buffers Porirua Water Treatment Plant.

Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve

(Department of Conservation owned and managed)

FACILITIES

Existing
- Walking trail from Spicer Botanical Park through the scenic reserve to the top of Spicer Forest and Te Araroa National Walkway
- Mountain bike trail ‘The Doctor’ through the scenic reserve linking Spicer Botanical Park to Te Rahui o Rangituhi and Raiha Street (constructed in 2015)
- Te Araroa National Walkway where it passes through the scenic reserve currently for walkers only.

ACTIVITIES
- Walking and mountain biking - mountain biking between Spicer Botanical Park and Lower Te Rahui o Rangituhi on the trail known as ‘The Doctor’.

FURTHER INVESTIGATION
- Remedial work to retain the lake at the remaining reservoir for heritage (Reservoir One has deteriorated and is now a wetland).

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF BOTH SCENIC RESERVES
- All unauthorised tracks will be closed
- Trails in the scenic reserves will have increased specifications for protection of the reserves (see section 3.6 for details)
- Mountain bike trails will be developed with a rigorous trail approval process
- Resource Consent conditions for trail construction granted for Te Rahui o Rangituhi will be applied to the construction of trails.
4.1 Main entrance and secondary entrances

OBJECTIVE

1. Spicer Botanical Park as the main entrance, three secondary entrances with carparking and a range of cycle and walkway entrances.

MAIN ENTRANCE

- Spicer Botanical Park developed as the gateway to the wider park with increased carparking, information, interpretation and facilities.

SECONDARY ENTRANCES

- Secondary entrances with carparking at Raiha Street at the start of the 4-wheel drive track and at Camp Elsdon, and Ohariu Valley Road.

IMPROVED ENTRANCES

- Improved walk and cycleway entrances from neighbouring suburban areas (Tawa at Chastudon Place, Elsdon at Aparangi and Waiho Crescents, Takapūwāhia at Rangituhi Crescent).

FUTURE ENTRANCES

- Entrances, some with carparking, from Wellington northern suburbs when development occurs (such as Kiwi Crescent, Redwood Bush Reserve and Stebbings Valley)
- Entrance from Titahi Bay with a trail to Porirua Scenic Reserve via public land that buffers Porirua Water Treatment Plant.
4.2 Locations of trails, trail development and use

OBJECTIVES

1. Tracks will be environmentally sustainable and affordable in the long term.
2. Wherever possible, separate users to ensure their safety in places where there are likely to be conflicts, particularly between fast bikes and walkers or horses.
3. When developing tracks aim to get downhill bikers off the 4-wheel drive track onto easy, intermediate and difficult tracks with no, or limited, intersections with walkers or horses.
4. If shared two-way use is not safe (through the track needing to be wider or otherwise designed than can be sustained by the environment) then consider one-way mountain biking travel, or in some places, separated routes.
5. Careful design of tracks in the scenic reserves to maintain the safety of users and to protect the natural environment.
6. Some exclusive booking of reserves for major single-user events is allowed.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

The focus for mountain biking in the park is to:

- Have a family focus
- Create mountain biking opportunities for children to learn and develop skills in an environment that can be enjoyed by the whole whanau
- Provide skill development
- Be a destination for mountain biking with a network of tracks on Te Rahui o Rangituhi that cater for a variety of skills. The trail network will complement and provide different opportunities to those in the rest of the Wellington Region
- Create an optimal number of trails that the land can sustain, and that provide a range of grades to achieve objectives. It is noted that there are limited grade 4 trails in the Wellington region.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

- Specifications will be increased for trails in the scenic reserves. This will include areas to avoid, construction requirements e.g. no root cutting, detours rather than cuts, keep the canopy intact, avoid destroying the form of trees when seeking height clearances and consider structures instead of disturbance
- The Resource Consent conditions for trail construction granted for Te Rahui o Rangituhi will be applied to the construction of all trails. A copy of the conditions is attached as Appendix 2
- A project advisory group used to review the detailed trail network plan to ensure objectives are met and a suitable range of activities are provided.
- Unauthorised tracks will be closed
5.1. Improving recreational connections

OBJECTIVE

1. Improve existing connections and establish new connections so that the public can make their way easily to the park from central Porirua, public transport routes (including the railway station), Wellington suburbs and wider trail networks.

ACTIONS

Northern Connections

1. Develop distinctive signage to improve wayfinding and lead visitors to the park.

2. Better define and improve walkway and cycle connections to the park using existing roads, reserves and pathways from central Porirua and the Railway Station along:
   - Raiha Street
   - Broken Hill Road
   - Prosser Street
   - Tawa
   - Elsdon
   - Titahi Bay
   - Raiha Walkway.

3. Fill gaps in the existing reserve networks where easements or strategic land acquisition would connect parts of the park for all users:
   - Between Rangituhi / Colonial Knob summit and Spicer Forest
   - A small area south of Spicer Forest to connect with Wellington Outer Green Belt.
Southern Connections

1. Overtime develop connections between Spicer Forest, Wellington suburbs, reserves and development areas from (see Figure 9):
   - Tawa
   - Redwood Bush Reserve
   - Stebbings Valley and Churton Park.
5.2. Enhancing ecological connections

OBJECTIVES:

1. Connect the native forests of Colonial Knob and Porirua Scenic Reserve across Te Rahui o Rangituhi.

2. Protect and enhance riparian habitat of streams, dam and wet seepage areas through best practice track development, weed and animal and plant pest control and supplementary planting as necessary.

3. Allow the dominant radiata pine cover in Spicer Forest to change over time to native broadleaf forest as pine trees fail, producing light wells and allowing natural regeneration of native species.

4. Exclude trail development and recreation activities in Spicer Forest west of Ohariu Stream where radiata pine trees have been damaged by wind, and allow the existing native understorey to naturally regenerate.

ACTIONS

- Connect the scenic reserves through weed, animal and plant pest control and plant to supplement natural native species regeneration immediately above and below the lower communications tower on middle Te Rahui o Rangituhi

- Weed control and supplementary riparian planting along Mitchell Stream, Ohariu Stream, dams and wet seepage areas on Te Rahui o Rangituhi and remove the fish barriers in Spicer Botanical Park

- Maintenance of fencing for stock control on Rangituhi / Colonial Knob summit area

- Stabilise land in Te Rahui o Rangituhi through planting

- Monitor and manage exotic tree stands in lower Te Rahui o Rangituhi and Spicer Forest as part of development for recreation

- Maintain former reservoirs in the Department of Conservation Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve as lake/wetland areas.

Figure 10: Ecological Connections

KEY

- Streams
- Ecological links
References


Te Rahui o Rangituhi Planting Plan. Landmark Consulting Ltd, August 2015.


Northern Reserves Management Plan. Wellington City Council, August 2008.


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