

The year of living dangerously - part one

It was a year of plague (double-decker buses), pestilence (damaging floods and slips), pontoons (the Kennedy Point marina application), pollution (E.coli in school drinking water) and pontification (by the Local Government Commission). And potholes, always potholes (with Auckland Transport's priorities ever-puzzling).

2017 on Waiheke was a roller coaster ride that tested the island's physical resilience - though miraculously, most people rode out the various storms.

Flipping through our back issues, it's always surprising how much happens and yet how little the big picture changes. Over the next three weeks, we'll recall the island's news, cultural, sporting and community events as recorded in *Gulf News*.

This week: January-April.

January

The plaintive yellow eyes and fluffy black plumage of a baby morepork greeted readers of our first issue in 2017. Blown from its nest in Onetangi, Rocky the ruru was rescued by two young girls. Rocky passed through a roll call of caring hands - Hue Ross, John Finn, Bryan Gartrell, Michell Hopkins and Karen Saunders, to name

a few - before being reunited with his parents.

On a more earthly note, residents were concerned about the capacity of the refuse transfer station as its 'rubbish mountain' reached spectacular heights. Owner Waste Management blamed a driver shortage and the island's booming construction industry for the backlog.

Disabled people were having trouble



Rocky the ruru back at its nest.

obtaining Ministry of Health funding for housing modifications because their houses were regarded as 'substandard', the Waiheke Health Trust said.

The local board adopted *Essentially Waiheke*, a vision document for the island which followed prolonged consultation. It reflected a strong local desire for sustainable development and tourism and was intended to influence council decision-making.

Residents from Rocky Bay to Onetangi enthusiastically embraced a pilot stoat trapping project which aimed to reduce the voracious predator's toll on native birdlife. Coordinated by Hauraki Gulf Conservation Trust with council and Department of Conservation funding, the trial was seen as a forerunner to a 'Predator Free Waiheke' campaign. Wai-GOMP (Waiheke Go Moth Plant Group) meanwhile sought help to wage war on the virulent climber that wreaks havoc on native bush habitat.

Local sculptors including Kazu Nakagawa were finalising works for *headland Sculpture on the Gulf*, while *Sculpt Oneroa* and exhibitions at Waiheke Community Art Gallery showcased local artists.

In sport, unheralded Waiheke rider Georgia Bouzaid and her Kaimanawa pony Bill were upstaging better-pedigreed rivals on the North Island grand prix circuit.

Public access to beaches, long a powderkeg issue on the island, came under renewed spotlight when the owners of a

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section between Hooks Lane and Surfdale beach put up a sign warning trespassers. Most people had assumed the section was a reserve but the owners grew fed up with their property being 'trashed' with rubbish and by vehicles.

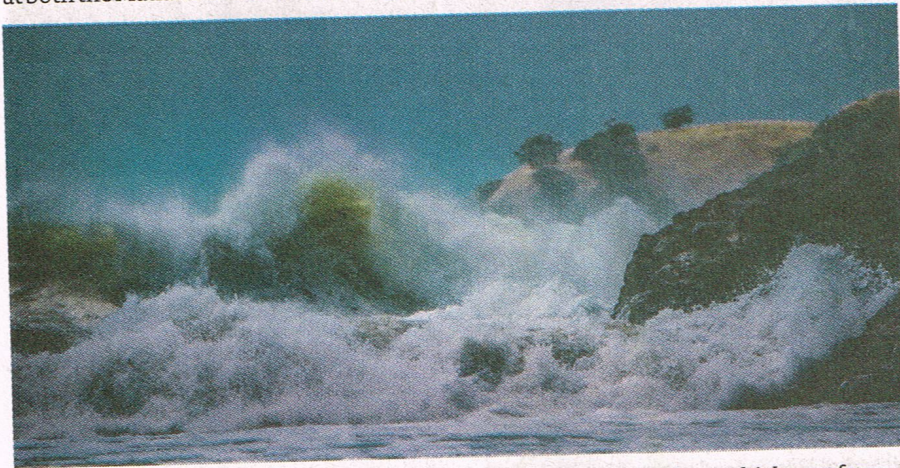
Savage cuts to roadside native trees galvanised opposition to double-decker buses introduced by Fullers for its 'Hop On, Hop Off' Explorer tours. Opponents launched a petition to remove the buses and stop the council pruning trees that provided habitat for native birds and geckos. Campaigners also wrote to Mayor Phil Goff.

After providing \$300,000 towards a non-polluting boat haulout facility at Ostend, the local board allocated \$50,000 for a footpath through the reserve.

As installation work for *headland Sculpture on the Gulf* began, the latest twist in a fickle summer was gale-force winds. Several sculptures were damaged while ferry passengers were stranded overnight at both the Matiatia and downtown termi-



Georgia Bouzaid on Redcliffs Bill at the World Cup Festival at Woodhill Sands.



Photographer Peter Rees captured the power of last January's storm which saw ferry sailings cancelled and damaged several *headland Sculpture on the Gulf* entries.

nals following ferry cancellations. Police and Fullers' staff found beds for about 40 people while Waiheke Red Cross supplied blankets to about 30 who remained in the terminal on a chilly night.

In a reminder of the methamphetamine problem on the island, the caretakers' cottage at Waiheke High School was tested for P-contamination after the departure of a staff-member.

Waiheke Rotary launched a campaign that would, by year's end, see more than 20 portable defibrillators (AEDs) installed in public places around the island for emergency use following cardiac arrests.

Hundreds of locals and visitors took

The owners of a Hooks Lane property erected a sign stopping public access to Surfdale Beach.



part in the 26th annual Wharf2Wharf event on 21 January, running or walking from starting points including Orapiu, Onetangi and Surfdale.

Members of the Fly My Pretties musical collaboration, here for a concert at Cable Bay Vineyard, ingratiated themselves to the wider community by leading a beach clean-up. But the month would end with a second late-night mass passenger 'stranding' when the combination of the sculpture festival and the Fly My Pretties concert proved too much for Fullers.

February

In a submission on a proposed 206-berth marina at Kennedy Point, the local board expressed "serious concerns". It questioned the establishment of a marina within the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park and the private occupation of public space. Board chairman Paul Walden feared approval could set a precedent for further marinas around the island.

Leading lights in Waiheke Forest and Bird had resigned from its committee after the national body accepted a \$120,000 donation earmarked for the island group. The conservation stalwarts were irked because the Australian donor, who planned to buy land on the island, had made his money in coal mining.

Councillor Mike Lee and local board chairman Paul Walden were both dismayed by Auckland Council's decision not to take land for an esplanade reserve when a Woodside Bay property was subdivided. They urged the council to impose a 20 metre strip above the high tide line to ensure public access but council staff pleaded poverty.

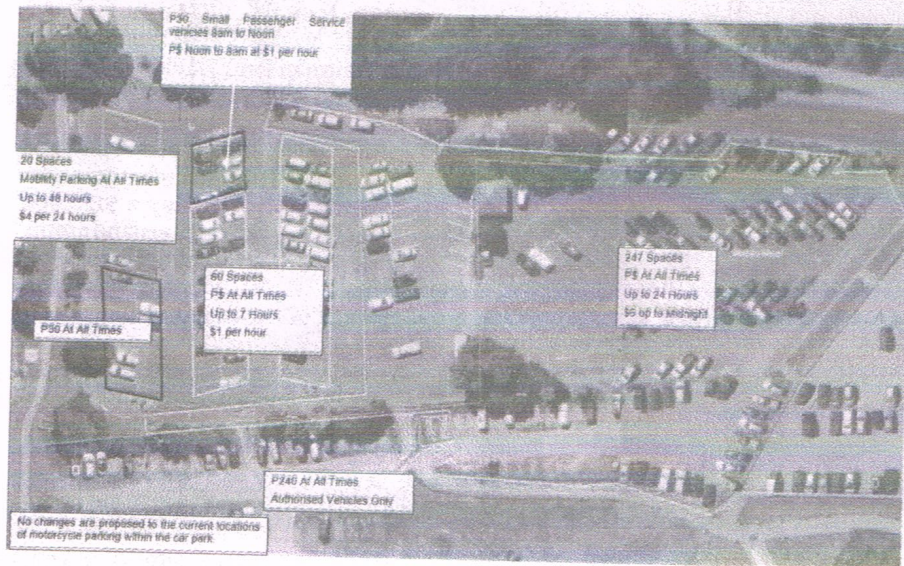


Conrad Colman thumbs up from his crippled yacht *Foresight Natural Energy*.

Cr Lee pointed out that the council could have acquired the land under the Resource Management Act at no cost.

The island's only public swimming pool at Te Huruhi Primary was closed after cracks were found in the bottom of the pool, highlighting the need for a new community pool. Its closure prevented learn-to-swim programmes and forced 25 competitive swimmers to skip summer events.

Waiheke Living Without Violence expressed concerns about a rise in P-fuelled domestic violence after police referred six cases to the agency in a week. "Most people are still in denial about the severity and what is happening in their little suburb, among their neighbours," said the agency's programmes coordinator, Lisa Smith.



Police also appealed for help after several men allegedly attacked a man in his 20s on the old wharf at Matiatia.

A new dementia support group was launched at the RSA, with the aim of helping elderly residents stay on the island for longer.

Auckland Transport's plans to re-arrange carparking at Matiatia - and double the price of 24-hour parking - drew commuter criticism when released for consultation. The planned changes aimed to provide more short-term parking in the seaward carpark and shift many 24-hour spaces to the Owhanake carpark, a brisk 10-minute walk from the ferry. The changes did not proceed.

Sailing enthusiasts were following our coverage of the misadventures of around the world solo sailor Conrad Colman, whose mother, veteran sailor Robin



Crowded House lead singer Neil Finn delighted *headland Sculpture on the Gulf* visitors with a short, impromptu set inside The Gateway. Photo Peter Rees

Treadwell, lives at Palm Beach. Sailing an older boat, Conrad was performing well in the non-stop Vendee Globe race despite electric shocks, rigging problems which required risky trips up the mast and a near capsizing in the Southern Ocean, when the boat was pinned on its side for hours. After rounding Cape Horn, a lack of suitable sails slowed his progress until, less than 800 nautical miles from the finish line in France, he was dismayed. Unbowed, Conrad set up a jury rig and nursed his yacht home to a hero's welcome in Les Sables d'Olonne.

Sculpture on the Gulf continued to draw daytrippers - with ferry services again

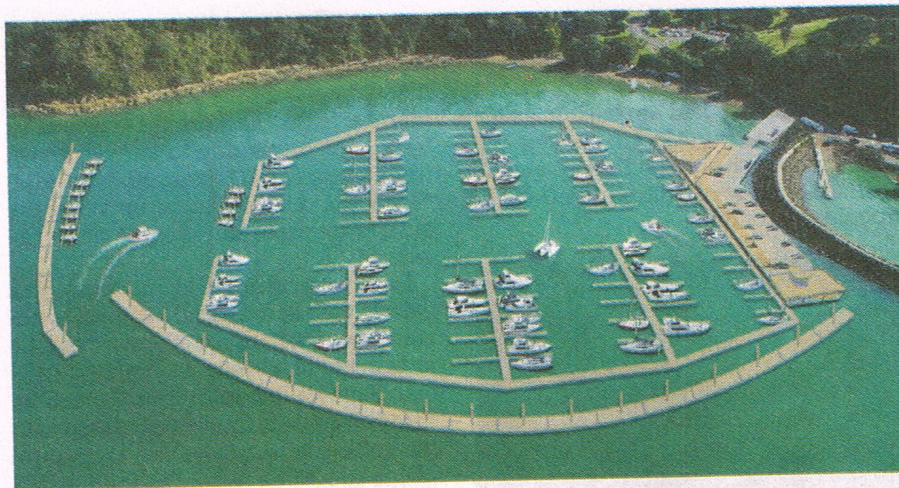
Commuters are squeezed out in Matiatia's front carpark but gain space elsewhere under the proposals.

struggling to keep to timetable - despite concerns that more explicit requests for "donations" before entry would affect attendances. Neil Finn gave an impromptu performance inside The Gateway, a wooden sculpture that would later win an architectural award, while nightly entertainment was provided at The Pavilion.

At month's end, huge crowds and hundreds of boats enjoyed brilliant weather at the Onetangi Beach Races, Waiheke Rotary's main island fundraiser.

March

Tuesday, 7 March was a day islanders will never forget, with a record 163mm of rain falling. Intense downpours would continue for five days, with a phenomenal 320mm recorded. Onetangi couple Jessica Mead and Anthony Stead and baby



An artist's impression of the revised Kennedy Point Marina proposal, which takes up less water space and features floating breakwaters.



Trucks were underwater after heavy rain caused flooding on Tahī Road.

daughter Bella, building a home on the Onetangi property, were asleep in their caravan when they heard the roar of gravel hitting the caravan "like machine gun fire".

They abandoned their accommodation at about 4am, with rain "pouring down like the Huka Falls". The next morning revealed a massive slip had descended from Trig Hill Road, taking part of the road with it.

At Little Oneroa, a 77-year-old woman was similarly threatened by a slip in Tawa Street.

Residents in low-lying parts of Blackpool, Surfdale and Onetangi found floodwaters invading homes and gardens. The Tahī Road industrial area was completely swamped, causing millions of dollars of damage to trucks, equipment and residents' items in a storage facility. The finger was quickly pointed at Auckland Council for allowing the natural flow of stormwater to the sea to be blocked when the nearby refuse transfer station was built.

Waiheke Primary School's administration block was badly damaged by 40cm of muddy water, destroying electrical equipment and carpets.

Slips closed several roads, including the main road above Little Oneroa for a time, and devastated several coastal tracks.

In the aftermath, it emerged that the council's Civil Defence unit in Auckland had no knowledge of the situation on the island. But roading contractors Downers came in for rare praise with their response.

The island's vineyard industry suffered badly with ripening grapes damaged or lost while Palm Beach Store and the adjoining takeaways were forced to close after a foot of water swept through the building.

The Metservice rain gauge at Oneroa recorded 408mm for the month - the most since record-keeping began in 1914.

More was to come in April and, later in the year, several property owners would launch court action against Auckland Transport, which was responsible for roadside drainage.

As the summer sun returned, vineyard-hoppers had a hair-raising escape when their Explorer double-decker bus slid off the road-edge on Carsons Road while attempting to turn. As we reported, the bus could not have come closer to disaster - tilted at more than 20 degrees above a steep bank but fortunately grounded on its rear axle. The 12 passengers and crew gingerly eased themselves out the front door and clambered up the bank before recovering at Thomas's Bach. The near-miss only inflamed antagonism towards the buses following earlier incidents with motorists and cyclists on the island's narrow, winding roads.

After submissions on the proposed Kennedy Point marina had closed, the applicants lodged amended plans ahead of the resource consent hearing, reducing its 'footprint' by nearly 2ha and the number of berths from 206 to 186. Opposition group Save Kennedy Point (later to become SKP Inc) was unimpressed.

"This marina is not needed on the island," spokesman David Baigent said. "It represents a dangerous step towards turning this island into a resort rather than the village that people said they wanted in the *Essentially Waiheke* document."

About 140 islanders attended meetings arranged by the local board to discuss the proposal ahead of the April resource consent hearing. While most were opposed, some island boaties expressed support for the marina. The board's summary of feedback noted that the gap between the cost of berths (ranging from \$125,000 to \$350,000) and the island's median income (\$27,000) "exacerbates a sense of inequality".

However, board members were not united in opposition to the proposal.

A Court of Appeal ruling ensured that parts of Man O' War Station at the island's

north-eastern end retained an 'outstanding natural landscape' classification. The Spencer family which owns the 2400 hectare property had appealed against the Auckland Council's land zoning but both the council and the Environmental Defence Society convinced the court to uphold the zoning.



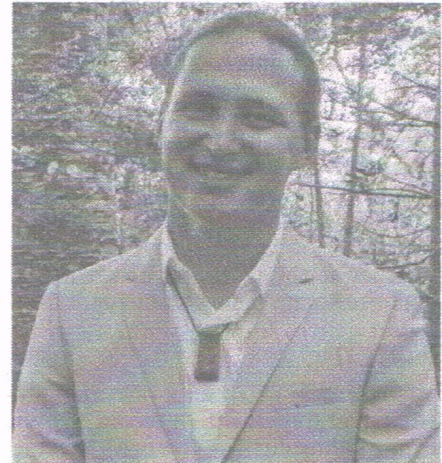
Virginia King's *Phantom Fleet* was the People's Choice winner of *headland Sculpture on the Gulf* 2017.

After a summer of passenger discontent, Fullers Group marked the 30th anniversary of fast ferry services by giving a reprieve to the *Quickcat*, the original fast ferry, which was due to be withdrawn from service. CEO Doug Hudson said: "She's the one that turns up when the queues are there and she just clears the wharf."

Local anger over Auckland Transport's decision to allow a jet ski business to operate from Onetangi beach prompted the local board to investigate a bylaw. Chairman Paul Walden told a board meeting: "This business is totally out of step with the culture of Waiheke and the values which should be upheld in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park."

At the same meeting, residents Pam Oliver and Jules Pattison presented a petition with 1562 signatures calling for double-decker buses to be banned from the island. Petitioners said the council was failing to consider the special character of Waiheke and not respecting advice from the local board.

Down on Blackpool beach, Segway tours came under fire for the potential danger they posed to threatened dotterels and to migratory godwits that spend summer in New Zealand. SegWai owner Andrew Lanyon responded that



Island environmentalist Michael Tavares was unable to stand as a candidate for the Green Party.

the guided tours steered clear of the birds. Piritahi Marae elders meanwhile led a ceremonial farewell as the godwits returned to the Arctic circle.

Virginia King's *Phantom Fleet* was announced as the People's Choice winner of *headland Sculpture on the Gulf* 2017 though organisers were coy on how many people actually attended. There was speculation that more explicit requests

No marina on Waiheke

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for a \$10 entry donation might have affected crowds.

Island environmentalist Michael Tavares, known for occupying a threatened kauri tree in Titirangi for 80 hours, announced his bid for selection as a Green Party candidate in the Northcote electorate. He would later have to withdraw because of his citizenship status.

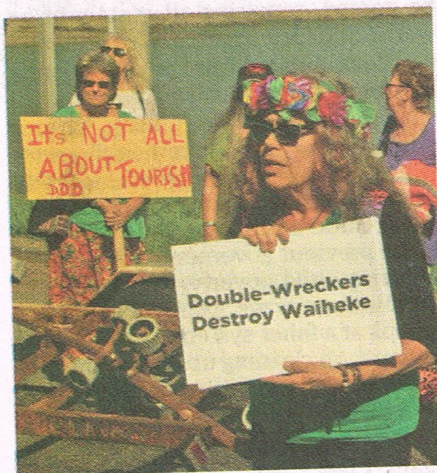
Whittaker's Musical Museum took possession of another rare gem, a Wellershaus organ which was a fairground attraction a century ago. The huge and colourful organ, replete with bellringer figurines, had been languishing at MOTAT and restoring it to working order was a long-term ambition.

Waiheke High School's athletics day saw records tumble while Waiheke Primary School drew praise for the high achievement of its Maori pupils in maths, reading and writing.

Fullers Waiheke United premiers made their debut in northern regional football's second division with a win over Takapuna while local gymnasts shone in competition against better-resourced gym clubs on the mainland.

April

Less than a month after record-breaking rain brought the island to its knees, shellshocked residents copped a second deluge - the remnants of Cyclone Debbie. Slips blocked Ocean View Road above Little Oneroa and The Esplanade between Blackpool and Surfdale - closing two of the three routes between Matiatia and Ostend. The Tahī Road industrial area was again swamped and Blackpool residents suffered more flooding. Many of the island's vineyards, waiting for red grapes to reach optimum potential, suffered heartbreaking crop losses just days away from harvest.



Susi Newborn distributes placards before the double decker protest march.



A sell-out crowd packed Rangihoua Estate for the opening of the Fullers Waiheke International Jazz Festival

Days beforehand, spirits had been high on a balmy afternoon as the Fullers Waiheke Wine and Food Festival drew 2000 people to Onetangi valley, with 18 vineyards participating.

Days later, the sun shone on more than 100 protesters who walked the route followed by double-decker buses from Matiatia to Oneroa; causing three 'Hop On, Hop Off' buses to turn back. Two Canadian tourists expressed their exasperation - until march organiser Susi Newborn whisked them off on a personally guided tour.

The hearing of Kennedy Point Boatharbour's application to construct a 7ha marina in Putiki Bay at Kennedy Point was livened up when local board member Shirin Brown challenged the composition of the Auckland Council hearing panel. About 27 residents spoke in opposition to the marina with four speaking in support. The council's specialist landscape architect Ainsley Verstraeten argued that the proposed development would have adverse impacts on the natural features and landscape values of Putiki Bay.

A charitable trust was formed to take the annual Waiheke Walking Festival forward, aiming to "continue to benefit the local community and businesses by showcasing Waiheke as a walking destination for both locals and visitors". The event is timed for November, outside the peak visitor season.

More rain just before Easter failed to deter a sell-out crowd who packed Rangihoua Estate for the opening of the Fullers Waiheke International Jazz Festival - the sodden venue soon resembling "Waiheke's very own Glastonbury". Many had come to trip down memory lane with star attraction Dave Dobbyn and the squelching mud just seemed to help them find their rhythm.

Waiheke Dirt Track celebrated its 30th anniversary with competitors from Waihi

Beach, Meremere and Waiuku enjoying the muddy track. Our correspondent wrote: "Bring on the next 30 years - hell yeah!"

The works of 32 finalists for Waiheke Community Art Gallery's 2017 Small Sculpture Prize were unveiled with Karin Strachan's collection of clay zoomorphic figures picking up the \$3000 prize.

After 24 years, Waiheke Choral Society conductor and music director Richard Melville let go his baton, reflecting on 89 concerts. He was farewelled with a repeat performance of *Carmina Burana*, first performed by the society in 1998. The show went on despite dance troupe Kaleidoscope's studio in Tahī Road being twice ravaged by flooding.

A new committee and community workshops revived Artworks Theatre, which had gone through difficult times in 2016.

At Onetangi Sports Park, South American fans were bringing home-ground noise and colour to high-flying Waiheke United, unbeaten after six matches in the northern football league.

A woman riding a hired scooter, believed to be a visitor in her 30s, was taken to hospital in a critical condition after crashing into a barrier on Ocean View Road, above Little Oneroa beach.

A Waiheke businessman in his 70s was convicted of indecent assault and sentenced to a year's supervision.

A lucky local won big in Lotto - a quarter share in an \$8 million Powerball jackpot with a ticket bought at Oneroa Four Square. And island restaurants Casita Miro, The Shed at Te Motu and the Oyster Inn made repeat appearances in *Metro* magazine's Top 50.

Auckland Council told the local board that some coastal tracks damaged in the recent deluges were incapable of being repaired and would have to be re-routed.