



# Oho Mai Puketi

[www.puketi.org.nz](http://www.puketi.org.nz)

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Newsletter of the Puketi Forest Trust

PO Box 257 Kaeo, Northland 0448

Ph 09 4050074

Patron: DAME KIRI TE KANAWA

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## Message from the Chairman, Gary Bramley

In the movie "Groundhog Day" the lead protagonist wakes up every morning to find he is living through the same day over and over, until he gets it right. The November AGM of the Puketi Forest Trust saw me re-elected as Chairman after a five year break so perhaps this is my own version of "Groundhog Day". The Trust has made steady progress in the five years under John's able leadership and he has now stepped into the Treasurer's role vacated by me and will continue to attend all the meetings at the Department of Conservation on the Trust's behalf.

When we established the Trust it was clear that we needed to have regular turnover of Trustees, including those in an executive position. New people bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm and also a fresh set of eyes to ask why things are as they are, and if they can be improved. This is essential for the health and sustainability of any organisation as things need to change and keep moving forward. Also it is very difficult to get people to agree to be on the executive if they think it will be a "job for life". Everyone is busy and no one wants to be bogged down in a job because no one else will do it.

So it was with a certain degree of reluctance that I accepted nomination to be Chairman again because my face is hardly a fresh one on the Trust Board. I was delighted to step aside for John because I could see he had different skills to mine and would improve Trust performance in areas where I was weak. This proved to be the case and he leaves the Trust in a strong position. The Trust has been blessed with fantastic trustees over the ten years since we started. We have also had regular turnover and a fresh infusion of ideas. I am always impressed by how easy the Trust is to run – there are no hidden agendas, no factional fighting, no egos to be tended, no dramas to be dealt with, everyone just gets on and does what they can do in pursuit of our goal of forest restoration – an absolute pleasure to be involved with, and comparatively undemanding considering the size of our budget and the breadth of our activities. We are lucky to have a mix of old hands and fresh faces at any one time, and some of those fresh faces stay around long enough to become old hands, which is as it should be. As well as new ideas an organisation needs someone with "institutional knowledge" so that if things have been tried and don't work out, the committee can be alerted to it before they make the same mistake again. I also think it is positive for the roles on the committee to be swapped around so that everyone knows how the different jobs work in practice.

I wholeheartedly welcome our two newest trustees, Jo Baguley and Erica Whyte and feel sure their enthusiasm and new ideas and different skill set will help us move forward too. Jo is an environmental lawyer based in Kerikeri with her husband David and two school-aged girls. Erica and her husband Lindsay are farmers from Taupo Bay with two grown children and three grandchildren. I look forward to working with them both.

Recently we received a substantial bequest from the estate of WA (Bill) Couper. Many of you will remember Bill as a keen Trust supporter. In fact he taught Jo and me at Kerikeri High School in the 1980s and lived in Kerikeri for many years before retiring to the Bay of Plenty. I would like to thank Bill for thinking of the Trust in his will and assure his family that the money will be well used in caring for the forest that he, like so many of us, loved.

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Previous issues of this newsletter are available at [www.puketi.org.nz](http://www.puketi.org.nz).

## Introducing Our New Trustees

### Erica Whyte



I fell in love with Puketi Forest when I walked for two days through the bush with my family and friends 20 years ago, before the trust was formed. I have been inspired by the work that has been carried out in the Puketi Forest to do similar programmes on a "minute" scale on our own farm. We have a 2 kilometre boundary with Ranfurly Bay Scenic Reserve with fingers of bush extending into our own property, and recently I received a large grant of traps to control mustelids, cats, rodents and possums. I enjoy taking visitors up to Puketi Forest.

Lindsay and I have spent 35 years farming in Northland and have been on our current 340 hectare beef farm at Taupo Bay for 25 years. We try to farm the land with a large emphasis on looking after the soil and the organisms in the soil, as well as having healthy, thriving cattle. Over a number of years we have fenced off our wetlands, streams, native bush and badly eroded land and have planted large numbers of native and deciduous trees.

I have worked for the last 25 years as a part time physiotherapist in Northland, now semi-retired, and plan on more tramping trips in our wonderful New Zealand wilderness.

We have 2 adult children and 3 grandchildren.

### Jo Baguley



I'm excited and honoured to become a trustee of the Puketi Forest Trust. I've long admired the work of the trust in achieving tangible results over the past ten years. The forest is such an important resource both locally and nationally and must be given the focussed support that it needs to flourish for generations into the future.

Some of you may have come across me over the years, either when I was attending Kerikeri High School or in my professional role as a director of Law North Limited, where I lead the resource management team. My family (nee Morris) has been part of the Kerikeri community since the mid-1970s. I left here after finishing school to gain degrees from Auckland University in law and linguistics and then worked for city law firms in Auckland, Christchurch and London during the 1990s. But in my heart, I've always been a Bay of Islands girl. I moved back to Kerikeri in

2005 with my family and we love it here!

I'm passionate about New Zealand's outdoors way of life. I've spent many years tramping and alpine climbing here and overseas. I met my husband David through mountaineering and we climbed extensively in the Mt Cook region together while we lived in Christchurch. Nowadays, we are mainly busy supporting our two daughters at their various activities around Kerikeri but we still try to keep our hand in with mountain biking and tramping when we can. Our family also loves camping at Northland beaches, especially our favourite—Maitai Bay.

I sincerely look forward to meeting and working with as many of you as possible over the next few years!

**The trustees gratefully acknowledge the following organisations which have made grants, significant donations or contributions in kind to the trust since the last newsletter:**

ASB Community Trust

Kiwis for kiwi

Department of Conservation,  
Far North District Office.

The Lion Foundation

Salt Air Limited

Tiny Mighty Power

## 2013 Annual General Meeting

The 2013 AGM was held on Saturday, 23rd November at Puketi Forest Headquarters. The trustees are now: Gary Bramley (Far North Forest & Bird representative and Chairman), Cherry Beaver (Secretary), John Dawn (Treasurer), Wiremu Williams (Piki te Aroha Marae representative), Ian Wilson, Jo Baguley, and Erica White.

You can find the chairman's annual report presented at the meeting at [http://www.puketi.org.nz/annual\\_report/report2013.pdf](http://www.puketi.org.nz/annual_report/report2013.pdf). Annual accounts for the year to 31 July 2013 are published on the Charities Commission website. Go to <http://www.register.charities.govt.nz/CharitiesRegister/Search>. Enter "Puketi Forest Trust" in the name box and follow the links to Annual Returns, AR006.

## Kokako Update

Kokako within Puketi have been monitored over the summer. Some indications of breeding behaviour have been observed but positive confirmation of breeding success (by clearly sighting juveniles) has not yet been obtained. Most of the tracking transmitters have now expired, so finding the transferred kokako is more difficult, especially those which are not firmly established in territories. The four pairs from Mataraua that had settled in territories on the plateau by the beginning of last winter are still in the same locations. The pair near the hut are frequently seen together and are heard singing most mornings – a wonderful sound to wake to.

Since early breeding forced abandonment of catching at Mataraua last spring, Tom Donovan and Steve McManus have been monitoring the breeding activity of the Mataraua kokako. They recently confirmed that several pairs at the prepared net sites have completed breeding, and their offspring are independent. Another catching expedition was organised over the weekend of 15 – 16 February. Although the kokako were not very responsive to song playback, one was caught on Saturday morning and a pair was caught on Sunday. All were flown directly to Puketi by Salt Air Ltd and released in good health. All three have since been tracked moving around the plateau, no doubt checking out the existing kokako. Sixteen kokako have now been released in Puketi since September 2012. The plan includes another seven from Mataraua. Further catching attempts will be made this autumn if the kokako are sufficiently responsive, and the remainder will be targeted next spring.

The single male brought from Lady Alice Island last autumn still has a functioning transmitter and has been tracked making a tour of the forest. From October to January he explored the eastern part of Puketi, on Totara and Bramley's Ridges and in the headwaters of the Waipapa River, near the Forest Headquarters. In early February he moved back towards the plateau and when last checked was within the core pest control area, on the main ridge track leading to the plateau.

Steve McManus made another trip to Lady Alice Island in November. In two days of perfect weather, Steve found no sign or sound of kokako, and sadly it seems that the remaining elderly male is no longer there.

## Thanks to supporters who fund traps

Keeping introduced predators and browsers at low numbers throughout the year is essential to maintaining and restoring the biodiversity of Puketi Forest. Trapping is the trust's preferred method of pest control because once the traps are installed it has proved to be a very effective way to keep predator numbers constantly low. Trapping is generally target specific, and the number of pests killed gives an indication of their abundance. Although toxins have their place in predator control, bait aversion can be a problem, the number of pests (and non-target species) killed is not known, and there are concerns about the long term effect of regularly using some toxins. The Trust has 4,453 traps and every month a number reach the end of their life and need replacing. Your donations go towards this.

The Trust is fortunate to have a dedicated and conscientious team of both paid and volunteer trappers who are passionate about keeping predator numbers low and enjoy seeing the forest coming back to life.

## Trapping Update

### Stoats

Over half the stoats we catch each year are caught during December and January when young stoats disperse from their nests. They often travel great distances looking for a suitable territory, and it is important that the new arrivals are caught as soon as possible. Without predator control, 90% of kiwi chicks are killed by stoats. In the last issue of *Oho Mai Puketi* we mentioned that volunteers had just completed setting out an extra 129 stoat traps on lines 6, 7 and 8 to reduce the trap spacing on those lines from 200 metres to 100 metres. Volunteers worked hard to put out the extra traps (bought with a grant from Pub Charity) and their efforts have been well rewarded. The extra stoats caught on these three lines during December and January met expectations. Line 8 was particularly pleasing with 16 stoats caught this year compared with 8 last year and a long term average of 6.6. The total number of stoats caught on all 10 lines during December and January was 126.

### Feral Cats

Part of Line 6 runs along the edge of bush on private property which is contiguous with Puketi Forest and contains kiwi. When the stoat traps and cat traps were laid out on this line we did not put cat traps along a portion of the line in case the landowners' cat was caught. However recently the landowners sighted feral cats on their property and helped install 12 cat traps along this section. Within a few days two feral cats had been caught. All the stoat lines now have a cat-trap every 400 metres – a total of 249 traps. Last year 24 feral cats were caught in the forest.

### Rats

When volunteers monitored rats in the 650 hectare core area at the end of July 2013, 10% of the cards were tracked. This corresponds to 2 rats per kilometre of trap-line. The target is less than 5% (one per kilometre). The trapping results from the plateau during the second half of 2013 have been interesting. Around the edge of the plateau is an 8.2 kilometre trap line, R3. Internally 21 parallel lines, 100 metres apart, run from one side of the plateau to the other starting and ending on R3. These are labelled RA to RU. 100 m outside R3 is another line, R2, which is 12.5 kilometres long. There are 826 traps on lines R2 and R3. In the past as expected, the outside line, R2, has caught the most rats. R3 catches less and the internal lines catch very few. However recently the internal lines have been catching more than expected, and in August there were more rats caught in the centre than on the perimeter lines. Perhaps this is because effective rat and possum control has resulted in an abundance of fruit, seeds and invertebrates on the plateau.

To reduce rat numbers, volunteers put Pindone in the bait stations on the plateau after the September trapping round. Slow acting toxins, although more expensive and more labour intensive, do have two advantages over traps. They do not kill straight away and one fill can kill more than one rat. After a rat has found the bait, other rats smell it on their breath and recognise it as a new food source. This draws rats to the bait station that might not otherwise be killed. Subsequent trapping results suggest that the toxin did the job and kept rat numbers low over these critical months when birds are breeding. From August to December, the catch rate dropped from 2.1 to 0.2 per kilometre on the internal lines, remained steady at between 1.0 and 1.5 per kilometre on R3, and increased from 1.5 to 2.3 per kilometre on the outside line, R2.

In November the Department of Conservation monitored possums on the plateau using wax tags. The wax tags look palatable and rats and possums cannot resist biting them, but the tags taste unpleasant so they only take one bite leaving an impression of their front teeth on the tag. Three of the four lines of 20 tags on the plateau had no rat bite marks at all. This confirmed the low numbers indicated by the trapping results, and was further reinforced when volunteers removed the remains of the toxin in January. In an operation without trapping it is normal to put a kilogram of bait in each bait station and add more a week later. We put in 200 grams. By January only a handful of bait stations had been emptied and the bait in many bait stations was hardly touched.

### Possums

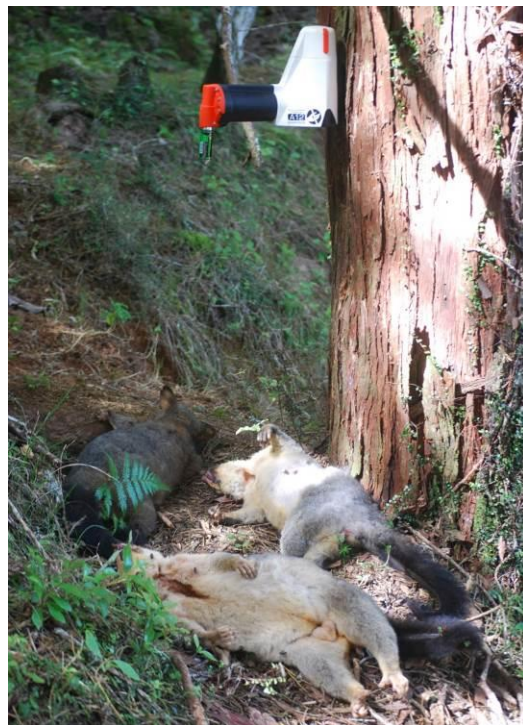
The Trapinators (possum kill traps) that we have installed at 100 metre spacing throughout the core area are doing an excellent job. More than one thousand possums reinvade each year, but they do not survive long. When the Department of Conservation monitored possums in November, only 8 of the 180 wax tags inside the

core area were bitten by possums – 4.4%. This is well under our target of 10%. In contrast, one line of 20 tags placed outside the trapped area had 10 bite marks – 50%.

### Self-resetting Possum Kill Trap

The trust was recently given three Goodnature A12 self-resetting possum kill traps to try out. When a possum triggers one of these traps, a measured volume of compressed carbon dioxide drives a spike into the possum’s skull, killing it instantly. The spike then retracts, dropping the animal to the ground and the trap is reset. The small replaceable canister has enough gas to kill 12 possums. The traps use a lure developed by Goodnature for extended effectiveness in the field. The Goodnature A12 easily meets the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee’s guidelines for a humane kill trap. The first trap to be installed was checked the next day and three possums were found under it – see photo. When checked a few days later another four possums had been killed.

These traps are still being trialled and refined. When developed, they should be very effective.



### Robins (Toutouwai) in Rat Traps

The traps in Puketi have been pleasingly target specific. Early on three chaffinches were caught in rat traps. At that time some of the trappers, when seeing rat droppings on top of the trap box, would place a little piece of bait just inside the entrance to encourage the rat to go in. An astute volunteer wondered if this practise was guiding the chaffinches into the box. This practise was stopped and no more chaffinches have been caught. Apart from the chaffinches, only four blackbirds and a thrush have been caught in rat traps over the last six years of almost five million trap nights (and days). It therefore came as an awful shock to find three robins killed in traps in one week - two banded males and an unbanded female thought to be the mate of another banded male. All were breeding at the time. Why after four years did they decide to push their way into the trap boxes? We assumed they were going after insects feeding on the bait, but why now and not before?

Numerous phone calls were made and emails sent. We learnt that other projects using traps have had the same problem. Some consider it a good sign since only a small percentage of robins get caught, and if they are caught in traps there must be plenty around. Others have responded by making the entrance hole smaller, but this could reduce the number of rats caught and perhaps result in even more robin deaths. In Puketi our robins are still establishing, and we need them all to be breeding. In response to the robin capture, we set off the rat traps in known robin territories in the Te Tawa area and filled the bait stations there with Pindone for an alternative method of rat control during the robin breeding season. We have also taken on board three suggestions for modifying the entrances to trap boxes and have set up a trial with 100 traps in groups of four, away from robin territories. One in each group is unmodified, one has a smaller entrance hole, one has a solid front instead of wire netting and one has a short piece of pipe at the entrance. We feel all these modifications should reduce the chances of a robin entering, but we want to be sure rats still enter readily before we alter existing traps.



The robins that have established on the plateau are not monitored but should have had a good breeding season with predator numbers at low levels. Robins are regularly seen by people working on the plateau. Those in the Te Tawa catchment are no longer intensively monitored but are checked on at least once a month, mainly by the trappers. Six pairs have been seen with chicks and the trappers have located males in new territories. The male whose mate was thought to have been killed was seen at the end of January with a female feeding a chick. So the unbanded bird found in a trap was either a "stray" bird we did not know about or the male very quickly found a new mate and carried on breeding.

## My Day in Puketi Forest

Stephen Jarvis

Since discovering Puketi Forest Trust on the internet a couple of years ago I have keenly followed their progress from the comfort of my armchair. Last month I was in Kerikeri for a couple of nights & plucked up courage to contact John Dawn to offer my services. He accepted my offer & arranged to pick me up the next day. For the first time ever I was going to get my hands dirty & do some real conservation work!

Arriving at Puketi with John & Ian Wilson I felt apprehensive. Would I be able to keep up? Would I be a help or a hindrance? Would my knees cope? We set off into the forest. From the outset John set a blistering pace. Luckily for me Ian kept a more measured pace. I stuck with Ian! While John concentrated on emptying traps I assisted Ian with collecting old rat bait & counting toutouwai. We counted seven of these endearing little birds & some greedily took away beakfuls of mealworms which Ian threw down for them - a sure sign they had hungry chicks to feed.

Walking through the forest I was awestruck by the enormity of the kauri trees & the strength & stillness that radiates from these giants. The success of the trapping program was evident in the lush undergrowth encountered throughout the forest. Highlights of the day included eating lunch while sitting on boulders in the middle of a crystal clear forest stream; and Ian rubbing polystyrene against his watch to produce a squeaking sound which attracted several inquisitive forest birds seeking out the source of this high-pitched noise.

All too soon our work was done. The terrain at times was challenging, & occasionally I wondered whether I was really helping John & Ian's efforts, but I managed to keep pace most of the time. At the end of this truly memorable day I felt exhausted but thrilled that I had finally left my armchair & got my hands dirty.

## Report from the Department of Conservation

Puketi seems to be increasingly popular with visitors. There have been record numbers of campers at Forest Pools and the Forest Headquarters camp grounds this summer, and increasing numbers of walkers on the Te Araroa Trail which passes through Puketi-Omahuta Forest. With improved signs along the trail, there have been no further walkers wandering off into other parts of the forest.

Six-monthly kauri snail mortality monitoring was carried out in January. Reduced numbers of predated shells were found, likely causes are the dry winter and reduced pig activities in some areas.

In late 2013, two kiwi were released near Puketi Forest Headquarters. These birds had been uplifted from plantation forest in Omahuta ahead of logging, and were released in this part of Puketi so that they will benefit from DOC & PFT pest control.

The Puketi river system has a unique plant community, including threatened species such as *Hebe acutiflora* and *Colensoa physaloides*. For the last 12 years, operations to control weeds that threaten this community have been carried out each summer. This year's work has revealed several new or increasing infestations. Staff have treated these and are following up to locate and target the source populations.

Ongoing goat control has continued in the two main treatment areas, targeting the relict population in the high rocky catchments to the east of the Waipapa River, and the invasion threat to the north of the Mokau Ridge.

The Department's Office in Kerikeri is working on a proposal that, if approved, will set up a major expansion of permanent possum control over 1700 hectares north of the Trust's existing core pest control area. This will involve approximately 900 possum kill traps (Trapinators) installed mainly on the existing stoat trap lines. The work will be funded by the Department and carried out under contract by the Trust.

## Tomtits

Ian Wilson

Shortly after the first robins were released in 2009, I went into the forest with two other trust supporters to see if we could locate any of the released birds. Not far from the release site we spotted a robin eight metres up in a tree. We threw meal worms onto the ground hoping to attract it so that we could see its leg bands. The robin obviously saw the worms but it refused to fly down. Maybe it remembered what happened the last time it went for a meal worm - it suddenly found itself caught in a net, measured, weighed, fitted with four leg bands, stuck in a small box for a 370 kilometre helicopter trip and finally released into a forest with enormous trees the likes of which it had never seen before. However a male tomtit, equally sharp eyed, had no qualms about making the most of an unexpectedly easy meal. A few weeks later when I was passing through the same area the tomtit appeared again, obviously hoping for another handout. I obliged. Over the years he has become more and more demanding, attracting attention by flying very close and landing on nearby branches. He has often been accompanied by a female. He appears to have had more than one mate, as some of the females have been more confiding than others. This year I have not seen his mate but he certainly has one, as during December he took beakfuls of worms away to his nest. This male is at least five and a half years old. (The oldest tomtit recorded to date lived just three years, but some probably live 10+ years – *The Field Guide to the Birds of NZ – Heather & Robertson.*) Tomtits in other parts of the forest have been seen feeding up to three newly fledged chicks. Although they have declined on the main islands due to forest clearance and introduced predators, there have always been tomtits in Puketi. Since trapping began they have increased in number. During the last bird count they were recorded at 14 of the 15 listening stations.

There are five subspecies of tomtits in New Zealand. Both sexes of the Snares Island tomtit are entirely black. The males of the other four subspecies have glossy black upper parts and upper breast, with white under parts in the North Island and yellowish under parts in the South Island, Chatham Islands and Auckland Islands. The females are brown above with lighter brown/grey under parts except on the Auckland Islands where they look like a dull male. The tomtit is also known as the pied tit or miromiro in the North Island, as the yellow-breasted tit or ngiru-ngiru in the South Island, and unsurprisingly as the black tit on the Snares. The tomtit belongs to the same genus as the toutouwai, *Petroica*, and at a glance looks similar, but at 11 grams is a third the weight. Robins normally lay 2 or 3 eggs whereas tomtits lay between 3 and 6 and rear up to 3 broods a year. If nests fail they can re-nest as many as 6 times.



Male Tomtit

Photo – Jenny Atkins

## Volunteer Working Bees

There are many important jobs to be done supporting the pest control and re-introductions that can provide volunteers with an opportunity to enjoy the forest and be useful at the same time. If you are interested, you can choose from any events on the programme below.

There will also be occasions when there isn't time to include a notice in the newsletter, and an email will be circulated. If you would like to be included on a volunteers' email list, let us know at [info@puketi.org.nz](mailto:info@puketi.org.nz).

### **Trapline maintenance and toutouwai monitoring, Waihoanga.**

Meet at the track entrance in Puketi Road, 8:30am.

Bring lunch, drink, and (if you have them) loppers, pruning saw, binoculars.

Dates: Saturday 8th March, 29th March and 26th April.

### **Overnight at Plateau Hut. Hut finishing and maintenance, trapline clearing, kokako monitoring.**

Bring sleeping bag, food to share. Reasonable fitness required (it's a 2 hour walk in).

Limited to 6 people. Dates: Saturday & Sunday, 15-16 March, 12-13 April.

In every case, contact Ian Wilson (09 401 9056) or John Dawn (09 407 4790) to confirm arrangements.

## Kiwi Listening – Volunteers Wanted

The official period for annual kiwi monitoring this year will be 18th May to 6th June, with a backup period from 16th June to 5th July. We have 13 regular listening sites in Puketi. At each site, Trust volunteers and DOC staff record kiwi calls for the first two hours of darkness on four calm nights. The long term trends revealed by these results are important indicators of the health of our kiwi population and the effectiveness of pest control.

If you would like to help with kiwi listening, call **Ian Wilson (09 401 9056)**. You will need good ears and lots of warm clothes. Training will be provided if you haven't done it before.

# Support

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## by saving money.

Tiny Mighty Power supplies electricity to small towns around New Zealand. They have recently opened shop in Kerikeri, supplying the Bay of Islands and Far North. As a promotion they make a donation of \$50 to a school or charity of the customer's choice for every new account opened, and a further donation of \$10 on every anniversary that the account is still operating. If you are in an area supplied by Tiny Mighty Power and if you decide that you will get a good deal from them, you can nominate Puketi Forest Trust to receive the donation from Tiny Mighty Power.

To find out how you can save money and how easy it is to switch:

Call **Shelley** on **09 407 6908**

Visit **Shelley** in the **Tiny Mighty Power** store at  
Unit 6, **94 Kerikeri Road**  
Hub Mall, **Kerikeri**

Online at the **Tiny Mighty** website [www.tinymighty.co.nz](http://www.tinymighty.co.nz)



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