



# HDC NEWS

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## District's newest library a cultural meeting point

Mackaytown may be the last place you'd expect to find a Japanese library. Resident Jillian Yorke has been drawn to both books and Japan for as long as she can remember and last month fused the two passions in opening the *Japan Library: Pukapuka* in the home she shares with partner Hitoshi Morishita.

Through offering free public access to Japanese-related literature, the couple hope to "share Japan" locally and nationally, promoting interest in and understanding of the country and its people, and providing a meeting point for the Japanese and Kiwi cultures. The inclusion of the Maori word *Pukapuka* (books) in the library's name reflects its New Zealand setting; Japanese people living here or visiting will be able to use the library as a literary retreat.

Speaking at the opening last month, Mayor John Tregidga said relationships with Asia are critical to New Zealand's future. "It's something I've been promoting for 10 years. Understanding is the key to respect, and this library will help communicate Japanese culture not only to Hauraki but New Zealand."

April 26 was chosen for the launch because it's an auspicious day in the Japanese calendar, when a seed sown

is said to yield 10,000 plants. A blessing by Kaumatua Tewi Nicholls included a prayer that the books would impart insight and enrichment to their readers. Appropriately for Anzac weekend, he also noted that "Japanese and New Zealanders fought against each other in the war, but now we are together."

Jillian says it was a book that first sparked her fascination with Japan. During her 1950s and 60s British childhood, "there were few opportunities for any other kind of Oriental interaction". However her father, whose World War II service as a dentist in the Royal Navy included posts to India and Sri Lanka, encouraged her interest.

The family emigrated to New Zealand in 1970, when Jillian was 13. After her secondary schooling and completing a degree in Japanese Language and Literature at Auckland University, she lived in Japan for 32 years, working in research, public relations, editing, writing, and translation roles.

Jillian and Hitoshi met in 2007 through their leadership positions in the Japan-New Zealand Friendship Society: she in Tokyo, and he a five-hour bus ride away in the historic mountain town of Hida Takayama. Hitoshi had already visited New Zealand many times, and in the 1980s had invited then Prime Minister

David Lange to a special event in Takayama. Wonderfully, Lange-san accepted; and when he asked to see the headquarters of the Society was shown Hitoshi's tiny 'apato'!

It was Hitoshi's long-held dream to establish a 'Japan Library' in New Zealand – a project he and Jillian have worked toward for the past seven years with a huge amount of help from supporters and book donors. "And it's still a work in progress," says Jillian.

Why Mackaytown? It was close to Jillian's parents' home in Thames, and within easy driving distance of Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua and Tauranga, she says. "After looking at 103 properties in the greater Thames-Paeroa-Hauraki area, this is where we found the one we liked and bought."

However, when the pair moved to New Zealand shortly after the purchase in September 2009, neither yet had permanent resident status, so had to pay a large sum in taxes and import duties.

"The immigration authorities were incredulous that anyone could actually own so many books and were convinced that if we really did, it must be for some commercial purpose," says Jillian. "So they opened every single box and checked the contents with infra-red detector equipment."



Above: Mayor John Tregidga dips into *The Art of the Japanese Postcard* as he celebrates the library opening with Hitoshi Morishita and Jillian Yorke.

For the library shelves, Jillian and Hitoshi had set their hearts on kauri, and fortunately were able to obtain some from a storm-toppled tree on a friend's Coromandel property. It was salvaged from difficult terrain for milling, with David Stone not only supplying the wood but cutting it into planks.

Then the house foundations had to be specially strengthened to bear the combined weight of the books (currently numbering almost 3000) and the timber. Hitoshi assembled the shelves over about six months, using no nails or screws.

The books that now fill them span a wide range of fiction and non-fiction, classical and modern. They've been donated, specifically bought, or come from Jillian and Hitoshi's private

collections.

In 2012, the library was selected to receive a Nippon Foundation *Read Japan* donation: '100 books for understanding contemporary Japan'. These became the core of the English language section, though many of the Japanese language titles which comprise the majority of the volumes can also be enjoyed by non-Japanese readers, as they are highly visual.

Among the first people to enjoy delving into the library on opening day were its honorary curator Allan Berry, local residents, Jillian's two sisters, and friends who came from as far as Kumeu.

Anyone is welcome to visit and use the library by appointment. Jillian can be contacted by emailing [japanlibnz@gmail.com](mailto:japanlibnz@gmail.com).

## Auditor taps into local knowledge

Independent auditor and civil engineer Steve Taylor has more than a professional interest in his accessibility audit of Council facilities. As the father of two sons who have muscular dystrophy, "it's a passion of mine to make the community more accessible," he says.

On May 7, Steve spoke at open-invitation meetings in Waihi, Paeroa and Ngatea, explaining the audit that's being carried in partnership with CCS Disability Action and gathering specific comment from residents.

### Why is accessibility important?

Improving accessibility around the District is important because poor access to facilities and services can affect the quality of life of a wide range of people. Accessibility issues do not only affect people using wheelchairs and mobility scooters but also people with age-related mobility restrictions (including loss of vision and hearing), parents with pushchairs; or those impeded by temporary illness or injury. The Hauraki District also has an ageing population and Council wants to improve access so people can remain in their community regardless of their level of mobility.

### What's the audit process?

- In September 2013, informal discussion groups were held in the three communities, which resulted in a number of issues raised by residents being incorporated in the Council's Accessibility Action Plan. This has provided background information for the auditor, and a framework for coordinated improvements to accessibility.
- Concerns and suggestions arising from the recent meetings have all been recorded, with the aid of 'post-it' notes stuck on to town maps.
- Steve will personally carry out the physical audit between June and July, wielding a tape measure, measuring wheel and camera. He'll be focusing on the road corridor – everything between property boundaries – within a loose 500m 'cordon' of the town centres. Particular scrutiny will be given to parking, kerb ramps, footpaths, road crossing points, and access to public buildings and facilities.

- Steve's report to the Council, when adopted, will become public information. It probably won't be possible to act on all the recommendations right away (a similar audit in Thames identified \$600,000 worth of needed improvements) so the Council will set priorities and budget for them in long term maintenance plans. Some works, for instance any on State Highway 2 for which the NZTA is responsible, may be funded externally.

### What issues were raised at the meetings?

- Among concerns voiced were the number of carparks for the disabled, their type (angle or parallel parking), size and location.
- Ramps from the road to the footpath were discussed; and several people expressed frustration about cars parking on the footpath. While this issue may be addressed in the accessibility audit, specific occurrences can be reported to the Council.
- Some residents asked that the audit include roads and footpaths on the main routes in and out of towns.
- A need for road code 'driver training' for mobility scooter users also came under the spotlight.

### I missed the meetings or have thought of something since. Can I still have a say?

Yes! If anyone has a concern for the auditor to consider, or any access issue which needs fixing, Steve recommended making a service request.

This can be done through any Council office, where our friendly customer service staff will even fill in the form for you if required. Or you can visit Council's website - [www.hauraki-dc.govt.nz](http://www.hauraki-dc.govt.nz) and click the 'Fix it - Service Request' button on the homepage.

Service requests ensure that issues are documented and 'signed off'.

## Short closure for toilet makeover

The two public toilets at Ohinemuri Park – colloquially known as Bottle Park for its landmark L&P bottle – will be closed for refurbishment during the last week of May.

A two to five-day window is needed to carry out work that will include repainting the exterior, repairing some weather damage, and replacing tiles and fittings inside.

We've timed the project to avoid busy summer, school holiday, and weekend periods; and signs will be in place directing people to the nearest other toilets at Paeroa Domain and in Marshall Street.

