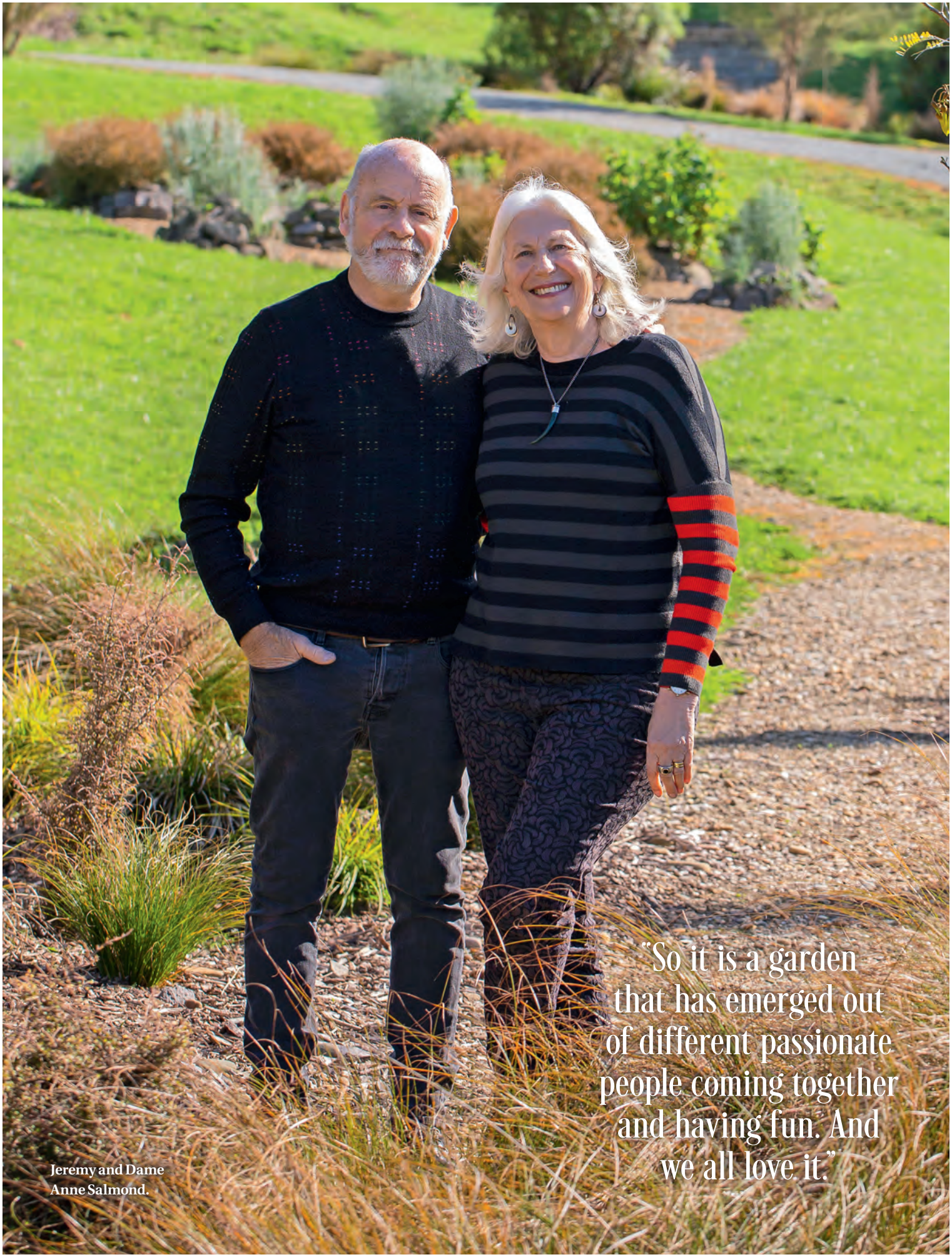
turn back time

This remarkable garden in Gisborne marks a turning point in the history of Aotearoa, and provides a safe place for endangered flora to flourish.

STORY: NICKY PELLEGRINO PHOTOS: TESSA CHRISP & MALCOLM RUTHERFORD, AERIAL IMAGE MICHAEL BERGIN



"So it is a garden that has emerged out of different passionate people coming together and having fun. And we all love it."

Jeremy and Dame Anne Salmond.

Stone piles in quincunx pattern.

Anthropologist Dame Anne Salmond and her architect husband Jeremy have led the way in creating a garden that botanically marks a turning point in our history.

When Captain James Cook and the crew of the Endeavour first landed on the east coast of New Zealand back in 1769, they found an array of native plants and trees that, to them, seemed wonderfully exotic. The ship's botanists Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander came ashore to collect hundreds of specimens, which were dried and pressed, then taken back to England.

Now 250 years later, our landscape has changed, and many of those natives are under threat.

So Dame Anne Salmond and her husband Jeremy have led the way in creating a garden that botanically marks a turning point in the history of this country and the coming together of two cultures. It is named, fittingly, the 1769 Garden, and its story actually began decades ago.

Growing up, Anne used to visit Longbush, a strip of lowland forest beside the Waimata River near Gisborne – it was a lovely spot for swimming on hot summer days.

"Then 20 years ago, Jeremy and I were looking for some land to buy because we both like growing things," recalls Anne. "We went to Longbush and saw a For Sale sign and just looked at each other – it was so gorgeous."

The couple ended up buying 20 hectares of bush and 100ha of farmland, and embarking on an ambitious restoration project, the Waikereru Ecosanctuary.

"We began by doing pest and weed control, and planting the gaps, then started planting wildlife corridors up towards the ridgeline," says Anne.

The 1769 Garden followed on, partly thanks to architect Sarosh Mulla, who designed and built the Welcome Shelter that stands above it. "Suddenly we had this beautiful building with a big area in front and we thought, what could we do with it. We had the idea of wilderness education projects for kids, and a place where they could run around and have fun, and see all the plants that used to grow."

Landscape architect Philip Smith was called in to create a design for the 100m strip of land and he knew right away what he wasn't going to do there. "It was such a lovely grassy hillside that I didn't want to take the typical botanic garden approach of spraying

Graeme Atkins.

Parsonsia heterophylla.

Pimelea prostrata.

Mānuka (Leptospermum scoparium).

Pimelea prostrata.

Scandia rosifolia.

everything, marking out the garden then filling it with plants," he explains. "Keeping it like parkland, that fits into the wider landscape, also made sense from a maintenance perspective."

Philip's aim was to give visitors that same sense of encountering the exotic that Cook's crew experienced. Since the kōwhai (*Sophora tetraptera*) were blooming when they arrived, their first impression must have been of the blaze of yellow. Five years on from planting, the kōwhai grove at the bottom of the garden recreates that effect. Further up the path, a grove of the threatened heart-leafed kōhūhū (*Pittosporum obcordatum*) is starting to form tall shadowy columns, and walking through it is an unusual, quite exotic experience. Joseph Banks mentioned fine groves of large trees, which were almost certainly kahikatea and so these have been planted on the upland path, beside the existing kānuka forest.

Since this is a very young garden, at the moment the most striking impressions are created by features that were inspired by the geometry of traditional Māori gardens. Stone mounds are laid out in a quincunx pattern that Banks saw in the kūmara gardens of Anaura Bay and the rows are inspired by those found at Palliser Bay. These stones provide the ideal place to grow rare and

Some of the plants that those early explorers recorded were easily found, while others have presented more of a challenge.

interesting plants – including kōpata (*Pelargonium inodorum*) – that would be quickly overrun and lost in the grass.

Putting together a planting list for the heritage garden meant in-depth research, consulting material such as Endeavour's logs and journals, and Banks and Solander's original sketches and engravings. Other plants are ones that grew in the Tairāwhiti, and were familiar to local Māori at that time, or are important to Māori for rongoa, dyeing, weaving and fire-starting. As Malcolm puts it, "Banks and Solander were really important for western botany but also just two guys who turned up in a place already settled by people who had an intimate relationship with its fauna and flora".

Some plants the team wanted to include were easily found, while others presented more of a challenge.

Fortunately it is the kind of challenge that DOC ranger and tohunga taiao Graeme Atkins thrives on. Graeme, an expert in the indigenous knowledge of these plants, spent hours of his downtime out in the wilderness, searching for the desired species.

One of his triumphs is *Libertia cranwelliae*. "It's a species of iris with a large seed capsule and hadn't been seen in the wild for years," explains Graeme. "I was out

Malcolm Rutherford.

Kawakawa (*Piper excelsum*).

Karamū (*Coprosma robusta*).

Kōpata (Pelargonium inodorum).

Libertia cranwelliae.

Jovellana sinclairii.

in the middle of nowhere and thought it was a weed at first. Then I whipped off a couple of capsules and planted them by my mailbox and it's a beautiful iris."

Kākā beak is another of Graeme's great passions as he works with two of the largest remaining wild populations of the plant.

He sees the 1769 Garden as an ark for rare east coast plants and is still on the lookout in the wild for several species including *Lepidium oleraceum*, known as Cook's scurvy grass – its high vitamin C content helped keep the men of the Endeavour alive. "So many things find it palatable – even the birds – which is why it's not here anymore."

Pest control is one of the greatest challenges here. Curator Malcolm Rutherford says that while the garden benefits from the trapping that is happening on the surrounding land, there are still a few unwelcome visitors. "We've had deer rubbing their antlers on the kahikatea; one tree got killed and two got damaged but thankfully have come back. And just the other week, we had a deer in the kāraka grove and it nibbled on every single one."

Prunings from the matagouri (*Discaria toumatou*) in the garden are used to provide a natural defence. They are put around the plants that are most attractive

Plants aren't neatly labelled as in municipal gardens, but instead left to grow as they would in the wild for people to discover.

to rabbits and only the hungriest fail to be deterred by the thorny branches.

Malcolm first arrived on the very first day of planting, so has been part of the transformation from bare paddock to garden. He is now a part-time member of the small maintenance crew, spending one morning a week weeding, mulching and planting.

"Some areas are intentionally quite wild, and others are tidy," he explains. "The kahikatea grove is three foot high in grass and that's OK. Because if you tidy right up to the edges then it becomes something different; once we over-mowed and it looked terrible."

Plants aren't neatly labelled as in municipal gardens, but instead left to grow as they would in the wild for people to discover. However, not everyone gets what it is they are trying to do here, admits Malcolm.

"It's on the edge of what people think of as a garden but it's not a traditional park either. And people still think some of it needs weeding out, as there are plants you could easily mistake for weeds, like *Senecio quadridentatus* with its silver foliage."

At the last count, there were 91 species in the garden.

"Every plant has a story behind it so you could spend hours talking to people," says Malcolm.

The Welcome Shelter.

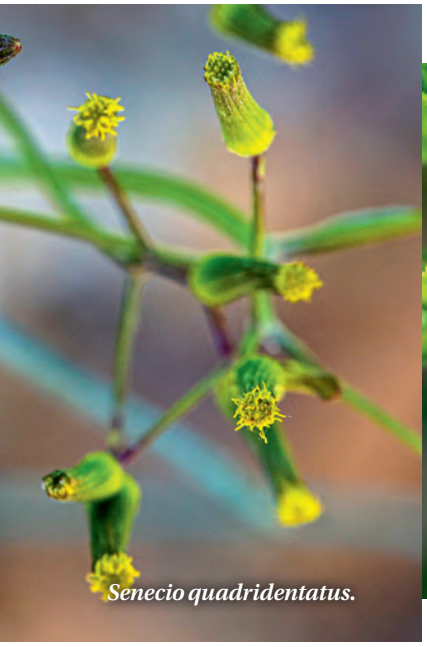
Carex solandri.

Tupeia antarctica.

Senecio rufiglandulosus.

Coprosma crassifolia.

Microtis unifolia.


Senecio quadridentatus.


Hibiscus richardsonii.


Discaria toumatou.


Geranium retrorsum.

All the people involved in the 1769 Garden know their legacy will really only come into its own for future generations of New Zealanders.

This is a relaxed place to be, and visitors are encouraged to have picnics on the grass and discover it at their own pace. Malcolm's own favourites include *Jovellana sinclairii* with its pretty white bell-like flower and *Geranium retrorsum* which forms a pink-flowered carpet over the rock piles.

While pockets of the 1769 Garden are already beginning to look pretty good, the people involved know their legacy will really only come into its own for future generations of New Zealanders.

Anne and Jeremy spend as much time as they can there, working on the land, and are powering forward with more conservation efforts – plans include creating a wetland and also a large community project to restore the Waimata River to health.

Of course, the 1769 Garden is far from finished. Native plants take time and the ferns can't be planted until the trees have grown tall enough to provide a shade canopy. And there is always the chance of Graeme appearing with something rare and interesting on the back of his truck.

The joy of the 1769 Garden for Anne isn't only the plants but also the people who have been involved with the project over time – the right ones always seeming to appear whenever they have been needed.

"Jeremy and I realised early on that we couldn't do everything ourselves because we're incredibly busy," she says.

"So it is a garden that has emerged out of different passionate people coming together and having fun. And we all love it." ✤

How to visit: *The Waikereru Ecosanctuary (including the Welcome Shelter and 1769 Garden) can be visited by arrangement only. Email info@waikereru.org.*

Garden plan

1 Welcome shelter
2 Bridge and entry
3 Kōwhai grove
4 *Pittosporum obcordatum* grove
5 Upland path
6 Kahikatea grove
7 Existing kānuka forest
8 Stone rows
9 Stone mounds
10 Carpark
11 Mounds

Plan drawn by Renée Davies