

The Story of the Building of the KPR.

By John Romanes

1984 saw the introduction of the Apple Macintosh P.C., the isolation of the Aids virus and David Lange led the Labour Party into its fourth term of government which heralded the start of 'Rogernomics', but it was not all doom and gloom. In July of this year three people in the Hastings district of New Zealand gave birth to an idea that eventually grew into reality and gave Havelock North in particular and Hawkes Bay in general, a unique and world class facility, 'The Keirunga Park Railway'.

Before this story is over I will have thanked many people, but to start at the beginning I must mention Ross Nicholls, Bill Harman and Bruce Fordyce, the three who started to discuss the possibility of constructing a ground level, multi gauge, railway in Hawkes Bay. The initial discussions were quickly followed by the survey of a possible site at the A. & P. Show grounds in Hastings, but following a meeting with the Secretary of the A. & P. Society it became clear that the restrictive requirements for access and use of this site were unacceptable. It was during the survey of this site that John Dunne and John Romanes (Author) joined the group.

On 13th August 1984 an informal meeting was held in my back yard for all those people interested in pursuing the thought of establishing a railway, as described. This meeting became known as 'The Founding Meeting of The Club' and those who attended were:-

- John Dunne
- Bruce Fordyce
- Bill Harman
- Terry McLauchlin
- Ross Nicholls
- John Romanes
- Harry Welch

These became the 'Seven Founding Members', but I must add that but for work commitments Bill's brother, John Harman, would have attended. That's how the cookie crumbles!! This group then set about trying to find a suitable site on which to build a railway.

At this time I was Manager of my brother's pre-cast concrete business while he was largely involved with local politics as Mayor of Havelock North and on the Hawke's Bay District Council. During morning tea I told him of the group's aims and activities to date and he suggested that we might like to look at the Keirunga Reserve as a possible site. This reserve was bequeathed to the public of Havelock North by the late George Nelson in 1956 and consists of 15 acres (6 hectares) of rolling hillside. Included in the area is the old 'Homestead' and gardens as well as newly built facilities that are the hub for the Keirunga Garden Society, which caters for groups such as arts and crafts, pottery, drama, lead lighting, to name but a few. A large area

of this land was unused, poorly planted and more of a liability to the Council than an asset.

Once again the survey party set forth, this time to see what Keirunga might hold. I would like to digress at this point and advise the reader that at this time I had no interest in trains or railways at all, but had only become involved due to my ability to provide the necessary equipment and expertise to carry out basic surveying. This involvement was due to my wife's job in the school office where Bruce Fordyce was Deputy Principal and her suggestion to Bruce that I might be able to help. I have never blamed her for the subsequent train of events.

The initial Keirunga survey started in the Tanner Street end of the gully with a view to working up one side of the gully and back down the other. Unfortunately the gully at Tanner Street was rather deep and some 30 to 40 ft. wide which posed a problem in creating a turning circle.

Bill Harman tells the story of us all standing in the bottom of the gully pondering the problem of how to turn the trains when this 'stupid bastard', (yours truly) who he had only met that morning, says "no problem, we'll just flick a bridge across!!" Little did he know what was to come?

After several hours we came to the conclusion that the grades in the gully were too steep for what we wanted and so we moved out onto the hillside at the rear of the Homestead.

This proved to be a desolate area of the reserve and was fairly steep with the Tanner Street gully continuing up the south western boundary and a steep drop off down to Pufflet Road on the opposite side. Undaunted we began surveying again and this process continued for several months with numerous variations to the route. On one occasion after deciding that we had a possible route pegged out we found that an error in heights of 1meter had been made and we had to start again. Round concrete blocks (unused test blocks) were set into the hillside to give us permanent levels from which to work and together with other land-marks; we soon developed a reference language, from which we could discuss the project. Ultimately we produced a scheme, all be it of frightening proportions, and proceeded to create an Incorporated Society of like minded idiots to work towards making our dream a reality.

Almost a year after the first informal meeting of the 'Founding Members', the 'Havelock North Live Steamers And Associates Inc.' inaugural meeting was held in August 1985. In the same month a submission was made to the Havelock North Borough Council together with a meeting with the Councillors to try and sell them on our proposal. Public relations exercises were also undertaken with the Keirunga Gardens Society and various neighbours. September and October saw on site meetings with Councillors and members of the Public, plus an afternoon at Bruce Fordyce's 3½" & 5" Ga. garden railway which was attended by both the Council and members of the Public. November saw five written objections received by Council and finally after some more meetings with both Council and Public we were, in December 1985 granted approval to proceed with the railway. The beginning of 1986 saw further surveys, realignment of some areas, requests to Council for approval for the changes and lengthy pondering over the feasibility of the structures. March 20th 1986 saw the acceptance of our Society as an Incorporated Society. April and May

were taken up with yet another route change and the submission of our Station Building plans for approval and by the end of June we had approvals for both issues and we could finally start work on site.

As you will all be aware, there is a vast difference between the number of members that a Club has and the number of members that 'do the work' and so it was on Saturday August 2nd 1986 that 6 members fronted up to start work on the railway. On that first cold day we had machinery to help clear the area just inside the gate, but the power was short lived as on the following day we tipped the tractor over, fortunately without any injury. So the trend was set for pick, shovel and wheelbarrow. By the end of the year we had completed, with the use of a large track mounted excavator, donated by Tony Tuck, the excavations at 'Stewartsons', prepared the abutments at 'Jan's Log' and 'Fletcher's Crossing,' completed the tunnel cuts for tunnels Nos.2 & 3, poured the Station building foundations and erected the concrete walls of the Station. As well as this both power and water were connected to the site. Bridge designs, aluminium casting at the High School for points boxes etc., gathering of materials from far and near and the raising of money went on off site.

At this point I should like to explain the derivation of the less obvious names of points around the track. Two brothers, John & Harry Romanes (Harry was to become our first Patron) were together responsible for the design and creation of much of the major constructions and during one of the many 'smokos', a remark was made that if their father Stewart had been alive he would have enjoyed sitting in the shade, having a smoke and watching the trains cross the bridge and disappear into the tunnel. From this remark came the name 'Stewartsons Junction' later to become simply 'Stewartsons' as a reminder of Stewart's sons, who did so much during the construction of the railway. Jan Raudon who, at that time was a Napier Harbour Board Pilot, suggested that he could provide some old wharf timbers that might be handy and when he arrived with a 6mtr long length of 600mm x 300mm hardwood it just had to be used for a bridge – hence 'Jan's Log'. 'Fletcher's Crossing' (now simply Fletchers) was built with steel supplied free of charge by Fletcher Steel Ltd through their then Napier Branch. 'Lone Pine' (now just a stump) was an obvious name, as was 'Peg 17' alongside the return track just above 'Jan's Log', which marked the seventeenth survey marker. 'Hill-crest' and 'Junction' were simple statements of locality, as was Tunnels Nos. 1 2 & 3. The 'Agapanthus Bank' came later after the area was planted in Agapanthus cuttings. Similarly the storage building under the down hill track became 'The Bunker.'

By this time the style of the four main bridges and tunnels had been decided and by spreading their design requirements over four structural design engineering companies we were able to provide the Council with drawings and Design Calculations at no cost to the Club. These were duly accepted by the Council and in September 1986 we started building the abutments for 'Fletchers Crossing'. October saw the station foundation poured and the cuts for tunnels Nos.2 & 3 completed. By November we had erected the panels for the station and power and water were connected to this area. The end of the year brought the completion of the walls around the steaming bays and filling of the yard started.

As we slowly progressed on site, our intrepid treasurer (John Dunne) was busy raising funds from various sources, arranging for the design, printing and sale of

'Share Certificates' and juggling our finances so as to produce the cash that we needed. It is a tribute to John's ability with money that, until the final six months of the project, we always had about \$1,700.00 in the bank. Additional funds were raised by providing refreshments on train trips, our wives 'Bake Sales' and donations from several interested, but non active, people. Terry McLauchlan (one of our founding members) was a sickness beneficiary and unable to tackle the physical work required on site, but he donated \$5.00 each week for the whole of the time we were building the railway, 5½yrs.

By June 1987 most of the track bed had been cut, tunnels 2 & 3 completed and filled over, and the Signal Frame had been uplifted from Te Kauwhata Railway Station. This signal frame is a 'Westinghouse Style L 24 lever' and was given to the Club by N Z Railways after some very good lobbying by Ron Harris from Hamilton. Bruce Fordyce, John Romanes and Ross Nicholls travelled north to strip out, load and return with over a ton of cast iron and other components that made up the frame. It is interesting to note that the three of them managed to carry the larger sections from inside the station and load them onto the trailer; however it took eight club members to unload them into storage in Havelock.

The second half of the year was taken up with the start of the two concrete viaducts and trestle bridge, the cut for tunnel No.1, reticulation of power and water around the site and embankments constructed. The Hastings Lions Club took on, under our direction, the supply and building of the curved trestle bridge up to, but not including, the deck stringers from pier to pier. Australian hardwood stringers were donated by several of the local County Councils and the deck timbers were salvaged from dunnage off the steel boats that made regular calls into the Port of Napier. This material was scrounged by Jan Roudon from the Port. Club members took over from the Lions and completed this bridge. At the same time the Havelock North Lions provided assistance with several days labour on site.

Most of the Keirunga Railway site comprised of a sedimentary limestone/sandstone pan interspersed in places with volcanic fly ash. In general it is "bloody hard" and simply laughs at a pick axe. We had available an electric 'Kango' hammer and Ross Nicholls welded his hands to it and labouriously cut through for the tunnels and track bed removing 100mm wide x 40mm at each attempt. Bill Harman grew his own barrow onto his hands and moved some hundreds of cubic meters of fill from one end of the site to the other and then back again. I'm sure it was good for his soul!!! Bruce Fordyce, in his typical way, did it all the hard way with pick and shovel, long crow-bar and stamped the entire fill into place with his heels. To add to the discomfort, the summers were the hottest and driest that we had experienced for years. (Look at the photos of the time)

One of the great 'unsung heroes' was Mary Fordyce, Bruce's wife, who carried tea, cold drinks and baking up to the site, from their home in Tanner Street, three times a day to provide for lunch and smoko's every day for most of the 5½yrs that Bruce and the rest of us were on site.

1988 got off with a hiss and a roar. Over the Christmas holiday break, Bill Harman and John Romanes moved into the Unicast Precast Concrete factory and in three days built and painted the 12 metre steel bridge for Fletcher's Crossing. The site for

this bridge was inaccessible for a crane, so the bridge was designed to be cut into three sections and these sections were brought to the site separately.

Each section was carried down into the gully by hand and placed into position on the ground, then with typical Kiwi ingenuity and a couple of wire hoists that were anchored to adjacent trees, the three sections were hoisted into place. Temporary bolts were inserted, the two joints welded and all within two hours we had our bridge in place. By June tunnel No.1 was complete, hammer-heads and abutments for the two concrete bridges were completed and more walls and fill were finished in the yard. August saw the arrival of two 40 tonne hydraulic cranes, articulated transporters and spectators to place the pre-stressed concrete deck units onto the two viaducts.

The level of support that we got from local business people is most evident in these two bridges. Piers were supplied from off-cut high tension power poles by Unicast Concrete Ltd who also supplied the labour and reinforcing for the pre-stressed beams. P B Lattey supplied two short deck spans and diamond cut the pier poles to length. Concrete for the deck units was supplied by Bridgeman Ready-mix Concrete Ltd., as was all of the builders mix used on site. (Bridgeman's also supplied our cement at 'off the wharf' prices) The transport for all of the concrete components was handled by L.E.Elms & Sons and all the craneage was provided by Hawke's Bay Crane Hire.

All of the above was free of charge, (the truck and crane drivers donating their time) as were council permits, supply and delivery of all of the fill material, engineering designs, 75 cubic meters of ballast material and tons of limestone boulders from Ian McFee's farm.

Two of our members put up the money for 10tonne of track steel that was indented directly from the steel works by Fletcher Steel Ltd. who absorbed their fees and saved us about 40% off the retail price. At the same time the Hastings Round Table Club offered to provide the material and produce some 9,000 ground treated wooden sleepers. During the rest of this year the concrete and steel bridges were completed as was the signal cabin, and work continued with the automatic signalling system and semaphore signals.

1989 saw work continuing on all fronts. The chevron wall that supports the 'Member's Lawn' was built, the "Agapanthus Bank" planted out, various areas were graded and sown with grass seed, drainage systems completed and the pre-cast turntable pit completed. Peter Stevens continued with the intricate work of re-wiring the signal frame to suit our operation and provide the necessary interlocking and a start was made on the construction of the 19 sets of 'Holder' points. This contentious points design was the brainchild of Henry Holder of Carnforth in the UK and both Henry and his wife Jean attended our official Opening and subsequent Convention two years later.

Deck stringers and bearers were fitted to the trestle bridge and the brick portals to both ends of the No.1 tunnel were completed. Work continued on the Signal Cabin while the finishing touches were applied to areas of the track bed, including the shaping of the water tables and installation of drains.

We were now about half way with our project and perhaps it is a good time to explain to readers just how much effort was being put into it. The bulk of the work was carried out by 10 members with intermittent help from a few more. Bruce Fordyce, who was retired, and his daughter Fiona spent almost every day on the site and did a huge amount of the hard work. Ian McFee and Harry Welch were both in their 70's (our geriatrics) and they also spent long periods at the track. The rest of us had regular jobs but spent weekends and holidays on site. Ross Nicholls worked 12hr shifts at Watties and often came straight from work to put in a further 6 – 8hrs driving the 'Kango' hammer or mixing concrete. Apart from the cabin floor, all of the concrete was mixed on site in an old 3-barrow petrol mixer and barrowed around the track to its destination. We worked rain, hail or sunshine and as well as the on site work all the drawings, tunnel boxing, traverser, steaming bays and the 13 gates were built off site by John R (in his spare time !!) while Bruce built all of the signal heads and a multitude of other components in his work shop. Another group spent nights at the local high school metal work classes casting points control boxes in aluminium. Many work hours were spent scrounging materials and cast offs that could be useful.

Tribute must also be paid to the wives (the railway widows) who took up the slack at home by doing all, or most, of the work around the house: such things as mowing lawns, painting, digging the garden and organising weddings without the help of their spouses.

By May of 1990 the service ducts, to reticulate the points and signal controls, had been laid and the cables pulled in. Concrete pits, complete with covers, were cast at various places to connect the cables and from which to run the feeders to the signals and points. The hoist and its 'Pump Room' were completed and the turntable was installed. Our turntable was built and supplied free of charge by Gordon Brogden who also built the Club's first 'Club Loco'.

There were many other projects being carried out by other members while construction was underway and whilst it would stretch my memory and these pages to recount them all I should mention two of them. Brent and Beth Mustchin planted and tended over 600 trees and shrubs around the Park and in particular the lovely Melia trees that provide welcome shade for the public as they sit on the hillside and watch the trains. These trees were planted at the start of one of our driest summers and for several months Brett and Beth carried buckets of water up the hill, morning and evening, to keep them alive.

Another enthusiastic member, David Osborne, joined our group and whilst he was unable to work physically he threw himself into fund raising and succeeded in selling the advertising for 10 passenger cars at \$1,000.00 a car, which covered most of the manufacturing cost. Later David bought a 5"ga. steam locomotive, 'Evening Star', which he ran at the Club until he died.

It was not quite 'all work and no play' as, from time to time, we managed to escape from Bruce's control and gathered at John & Nola Romanes' place for a barbeque, or a riotous evening as guests at Harry and Gwyn Welch's home around Christmas time. Occasionally we had a beer at the end of the days work and I well remember one Saturday when we pressed John Dunne to 'shout' for his birthday. He finally went down to the Village and returned, still muttering, with two dozen beers, one for

us and one for him to take home. There were only about 4 or 5 of us left but we made short work of our dozen and then, while John was away down in the gully attending to nature, we ripped into the second dozen. John was none the pleased, but we were beyond caring. Funny thing, we never got John to shout for us again!!

Progress continued with the deck and handrails being fitted to the trestle bridge, completion of the steaming bays, concrete points pads poured and considerable finishing off and grading of banks, track and yards. Further concrete was poured in several places and whilst it is now hard to remember all the things that needed attention, I can assure you that we were still very busy.

The summer of 1991 saw the completion of the hoist and its machinery, hand rails fitted to all the bridges together with their gates, completion of the point's pads and the foundations and floor of the 'Bunker' poured. By April the first set of points were operated from the signal frame and the walls, roof and doors for the 'Bunker' were finished. This was followed by the beginning of track-laying in the capable hands of Harry Welch and Ian McFee and was completed by October, when ballasting and final alignment was started. Simultaneously Bruce Fordyce and Bob Jackson installed the points and connected up the control wiring, testing each one as they went.

Bob had spent many months constructing the various types of points that we required and it is a tribute to Bob that they turned out so well. As track laying continued, the area over the 'Bunker' was filled and compacted and the face of the embankment covered with grassed sods. Signal gantries were installed and wired back to the signal frame and a multitude of final connections made. More work on additional drainage, access paths, fencing and the building of the pedestrian over bridge to provide public access to the hill.

By the end of the year we were nearing completion and with the end in sight it was decided that we would open at Easter 1992. Going back some time, we had a period when we were frequently visited by the police, with Sergeant Nigel Petrie enquiring as to what we were doing. However, his interest was not in a professional capacity, but rather more personal and he subsequently joined the club and went on to become our 'Opening Convener'. As well as this he spent considerable time working on the project as well as making good use of his connections on our behalf.

Considering that most of the work was carried out by hand and the use of simple levers and brute strength, we were surprisingly free of accidents. But accidents did occur and three of them come to mind. During the placing of the roof on the 'Signal Cabin', the rope that Bruce had affixed to the ridge as a safety line came undone and Bruce fell off the roof rather heavily. Fortunately it was on the lower station side of the building, but he was still badly bruised and shaken. Ian Mc Fee succumbed to the heat and had to be carried down to the station building, and it was some time before he was sufficiently re-hydrated and able to regain his feet. The most serious mishap occurred to John Harman who had a skilsaw cut a deep gash in his leg when the guard over the blade failed to close properly. This resulted in a trip to the hospital and several stitches being inserted.

Another event that could have ended badly was when Fiona Fordyce, who was Bruce's personal 'gofer' and assistant, was barrowing spoil from Bruce's excavation and emptying it over the bank above the Tanner Street gully. On one trip, Fiona had

the barrow too far over the edge and as she started to tip it took off down the bank. This section of the gully is particularly steep and the barrow, with Fiona still firmly hanging on, careered down the slope at an ever increasing speed to finally come to rest at the bottom with Fiona in a heap on top of it. Fiona got to her feet, apparently unhurt, and said, "Stop your bloody laughing and come down and help me get this thing back up before the old man finds out."

It was suddenly 1992 and the final push had started. Innumerable jobs to put the final touches to things were attacked with a renewed gusto. Final services were installed and connected, alignments and super-elevations were carefully completed and the pedestrian over bridge, to bring passengers onto the platforms, was built. Off site, Nigel's team were flat out with the advertising and catering for the opening. Everyone was praying for fine weather and hoping that everything would work as planned. Although we had operated the railway on a couple of days prior to the opening we had not had it put under any pressure, as it turned out the only thing that failed to live up to our expectations, was the signalling system that simply could not cope with the number of trains that were on the track at one time.

On Friday 17th April 1992 at 8.30am the 'Keirunga Park Railway' opened, and we were in business. Visitors from other clubs arrived, the hoist went up and down, the turntable turned, the traverser traversed and the points pointed the trains in the right direction. Soon the hills of Havelock were ringing with the sound of train whistles and the public streamed in to see what the fuss was all about. At 10.30am on the Saturday our patron, Harry Romanes, officially opened the railway and was heard to say, "I think you've got a tiger by the tail." How right he was as by the time the weekend had finished we had carried in excess of 6,000 passengers with 42 locomotives and had established our railway as one of the places to visit. Sunday night saw us all in our finery at the official Opening Dinner held in a local conference venue where we finally relaxed and patted each other backs. The details of the opening weekend are well documented and so I will not go further other than to apologise to all of the members who have not got a mention, but contributed in both large and small amounts, both at the coal face and behind the scenes to create a facility that has few equals.

It is now Easter 2012, 20yrs on, and the club has added the locomotive shed, wagon shed, roofed the steaming bays and built a cover for the platform area. The signal system has been redesigned and now works in a more user friendly manner, the passing loop at 'Stewartsons' and spur on the 'Agapanthus bank' have been removed. Some additional storage sidings have been added and we have all got older, and many of the team that created this railway are no longer with us.

Those of us that are left hope that the railway continues to provide enjoyment to many and helps to bring together all those people who share an interest in model engineering and railways.

John Romanes.

Founding Member.

APPENDIX

KEIRUNGA – Place on the hills.

The Club Emblem

The Havelock North Live Steamers and Associates have a coat of arms that was designed by the late Geoff Fuller of Havelock North. Geoff was a teacher at Hastings Boys High School, a talented artist and, a fact that was little known, had served an apprenticeship at the Hutt Railway Workshops.

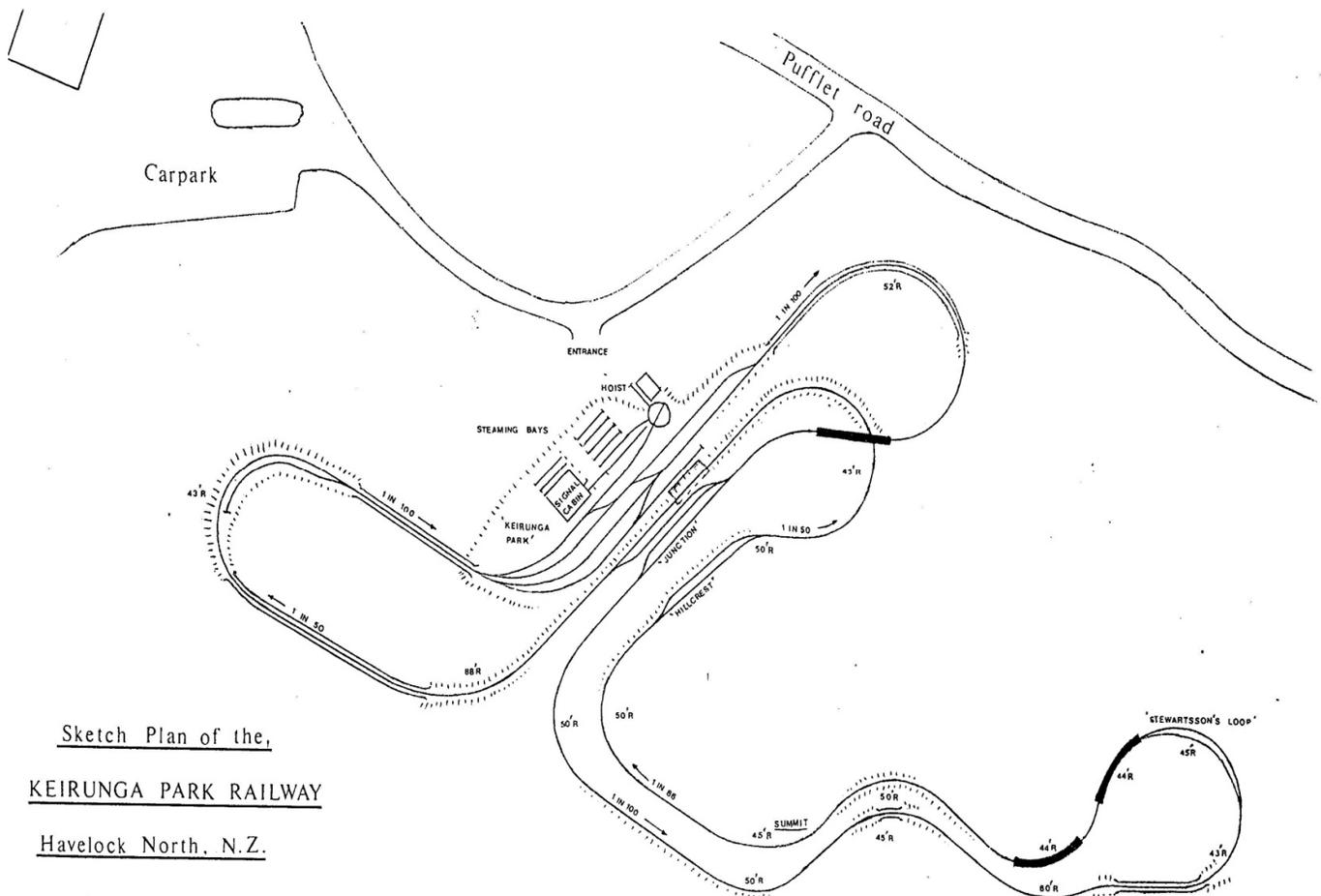
The green shield depicts the park in which we are situated and bears the cross from Sir Henry Havelock's coat of arms along with stylized silver flowers representing the gardens at Keirunga.

The surrounding belt and buckle in red with gold lettering is typical of many heraldic designs used by the old railways in Great Britain.

Club Badge

As well as the enamelled club badge that carries the club coat of arms there is another club badge.

This badge consists of three spoked, counter-weighted and coupled wheels over a bar that contains the words - *HAVELOCK NORTH LIVE STEAMERS & ASSOCIATES*. They were cast in silver using the 'lost wax' process and only 30 were cast. These are now becoming collector's items.



Sketch Plan of the,
KEIRUNGA PARK RAILWAY
Havelock North, N.Z.

(Not to scale)