

Report on Summer Gathering/Summer Gathering 2006 Waipiata, Central Otago

Two Meetings combined efforts to offer Summer Gathering January 2006 - Friends in Christchurch preparing the programme, and a group in Dunedin working on all other aspects. A superb site was found, En Hakkore, the former sanatorium near Waipiata in Central Otago, which is now the base of a Christian community and retreat centre. The owners and other community members were truly helpful and co-operative. One evening they spoke to us of the process by which they had been led to set up the community, which moved many Friends powerfully.

Over 150 Friends attended for all or part of the time. This was many more than originally estimated, because the location was so far south, but many Friends from the northern half of the North Island took advantage of the opportunity for a holiday in the region. When the editor of the local paper visited the site, it was impressive to introduce him to a discussion group whose participants came from Invercargill, Kaitaia and many places in between. The large numbers put some pressure on accommodation, catering and other facilities.

Three Dunedin Friends volunteered to serve as cooks. They coped imperturbably with a doubling of the original estimated numbers and its consequences: kitchen facilities not fully adapted to cook such quantities, an inefficient serving layout (because we had to change from the original dining room), and the need for clear-up teams to pass through the kitchen. Enjoyable food was offered for a whole range of dietary needs.

A Gathering lasting for eight nights felt a suitable length. Most of one day was taken up by a picnic (rated very highly in evaluations), and of another by a range of excursions, taking advantage of the remarkable landscape and historic settlements of the Maniototo. On each morning of other days a session was held on the theme, "Bridging the Gaps", introduced by a variety of Friends. As usual, a multiplicity of interest groups sprouted, causing some confusion among first-timers who felt a need for a more organised schedule. In order to avoid a rushed timetable, we did not schedule a daily time for home groups to meet. After their first meeting they were invited to plan whatever activities they wished, and arrange their own times.

We met in daily worship. Originally the under 16s had their own programme scheduled for this time, but their organisers and others Friends perceived the importance of children joining the Meeting for at least part of its time. A few Friends gathered for early morning worship, epilogues were offered each evening, and there were two afternoon opportunities for extended worship, up to three hours.

The under-16 programme offered activities to three age-groups, including times for reflection and a variety of crafts which made our buildings more colourful. This programme was highly praised in evaluations. Young Friends seized the opportunity to reverse day and night. As happens at most Summer Gatherings, they formed a loving and supportive body, but interaction between Young Friends and other age groups was less frequent. Two Young Friends hosted the concert with panache, and four older Young Friends reported movingly on the 2005 World Gathering of Young Friends in England.

A number of Friends offered service of an hour or more to the En Hakkore community one day. Our closing night as usual featured a concert, graced by clowns, music and other talented performances. Summer Gathering relies on the gifts of its participants and their willingness to support and enjoy one another. The many contributions from Friends enriched the 2006 Gathering.