



Update from Wwoof Headquarters

Wwoof NZ Newsletter
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Hi from Andrew and Jane...

It's well into harvest season now – a time to enjoy the fruits of the hard work done earlier. One of the problems of being a Wwoofer who moves from farm to farm is that they often miss out on the satisfaction of seeing their work through all the stages. For example a Wwoofer may plant veges in the spring but not be around to see them served with the meals, or a Wwoofer may come and eat fresh fruit but not appreciate all the work of mulching, pruning etc that happened over the previous winter and spring.

A neat couple came to stay with us from Zurich for a few weeks. Peter and Michelle have a 3 1/2 year old daughter who was happily adopted by our 5 older kids. Peter is a gardener which was great as he knew what to pull out and what to leave in and how to use a scrub cutter! Michelle is an Italian cook so she volunteered to do some exciting kitchen duties (which gave Jane more time to catch up with Wwoofer applications, queries etc).

Any feedback on items in this newsletter or any interesting stories and ideas about your Wwoof experiences would be greatly appreciated. We look forward to hearing from you.

Andrew and Jane.

Farewell to Hans Holtmann

It is with regret and sadness that we farewell a long standing Wwoof Host Hans Holtmann. Hans was killed tragically in an accident on the 5th February, 2002. Hans lived near Whangarei and often took advantage of being near the sea, sharing his interests in sailing, kayaking and the coast with his Wwoofers. Hans and his Wwoofer Toby had recently completed an Africa Mud Hut. Hans was a gregarious person who enjoyed sharing his knowledge of Permaculture with students who visited his property. Our thoughts and sympathy to Hans' family, his presence will be greatly missed.

Updates and Renewals

Host Membership Renewal slips will be sent out in early July (and also requests for any updates to your listing). They will be due back by the 15th of August to be included in the next edition of the Wwoof Book.

Katie Nimmo's Research Project Completed

Katie has completed her thesis which examines why travellers choose to go Wwoofing in NZ and also what role the Wwoof Organization unwittingly plays in general tourism in New Zealand. A full copy of the thesis and an executive summary are available by request from Wwoof Headquarters. The summary can also be read at www.wwoof.co.nz/research. Congratulations to Katie for producing such an informative document (for which she has been awarded an "A").

The following are some excerpts from the research. While they do not provide a complete overview of the research, they do provide an insight into some of the information gathered and some of the conclusions reached.

Excerpts from "Wwoof: A Case Study":

"Ecotourism has been proposed by some as an 'ideal' form of alternative tourism which simultaneously serves to protect the environment and sustain local communities. Wearing (1997, 1998) suggests a number of qualities that constitute an 'ideal' ecotourism. All of these can be found within the aims of Wwoof.

A total of ten interviews were conducted with travellers. The shortest travel time overall was five months, but some participants were travelling for up to a year. For the very long-term travellers, (about half of the participants) the length of time they spent in Aotearoa/New Zealand was generally only a small proportion of their overall travel time. The other half of the travellers were spending the majority of their travel time in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The need to escape from a wider social context and/or urban environments was occasionally explicitly mentioned by research participants as a travel motivation. Christine had become disillusioned with the 'general negativity and apathy' she observed in her home (British) society, and disliked how crowded it was. In reflecting on why she chose to travel to Aotearoa/New Zealand, Maria felt that it provided a refreshing alternative to Germany, which had a 'huge history', big buildings, and was too industrial.

Some participants maintained that a rural lifestyle appealed to them because rural people seemed to have more control over their lives than city people. Rural people were not bound to the endless rush and routine of a nine-to-five-job. Clive especially appreciated the flexibility a rural lifestyle offered his hosts. As well as working, they were able to plan '*...a few hours a day to spend with your kids or go for a swim.*'

Avoiding tourist places was another strong incentive for research participants to join Wwoof. Rachel stayed away from tourist places because they were too much like a city: '*...it's just a bunch of people who are going really fast, taking lots of pictures and not really breathing it in...*'. Many host farms are located in remote areas, and living on these farms enabled the research participants to enjoy 'tourist free' places, and beautiful natural features that were on these private properties. Clive and Lee also made use of local knowledge to visit places that were not well known tourist attractions.

Anahata, Christine, Sam, Rachel and Annie all indicated that they subscribed in some way to 'green' values, which included an awareness about environmental issues and concern about the link between food and health. These values influenced their travel choices, interactions with the places that they travel through, their decision to join Wwoof and their interactions with Wwoof hosts. The link between food and health and an ensuing interest in organic food was often a starting point from which some research participants developed a more general awareness in environmental issues.

Environmental values of some research participants often extended into concerns about social justice issues and global capitalism. What is striking about these research participants is that they were adept at linking local issues with global trends, and used this awareness as a way to inform their travel motivations and choices. Sam commented:

"I became really interested in organics for a number of reasons. One was personal health. I think is always important.

But for me, that's the least on the list. The second was social. And by that I mean, there's a lot of world injustice basically, companies will go to third world nation(s) and really strong arm the farmers there into using massive chemical methods.... The person who is growing the food, I don't want them to be pressured to expose themselves, their family to these chemicals. And there's the environment, and the effects that those methods have on the environment, which are huge, multiple, all sorts.... So by supporting the organics industry, I'm encouraging better health in everybody around me".

In some instances, research participants held a view that the Earth and the non-human communities sustained by the Earth were entities in their own right, and thus deserved to be treated with appropriate respect. Christine joined WWOOF because she wanted to learn how to *'...live with as little destructive impact on the environmental surrounds as possible'*. Rachel joined WWOOF because she preferred to be in beautiful natural environments. But it also was important for her to be able to *'give something back'* to the local communities and the Earth, instead of only *'taking'* from them:

"When I go travelling, a lot of the reason behind it is to see the land, and just to have a connection with the Earth. And so I feel that if I'm going and looking..., then I should also give back. And it's when you give, you receive. It's more gratifying, it gets more fulfilling.... (If) you stay at farms and ... you're learning and you're giving and you're receiving, then it's just sort of a circle instead of ...something else. It's whole".

Most research participants joined WWOOF because it allowed them to experience rural lifestyle, which was novel to them because they had lived in cities or towns for their entire lives. The activities associated with rural life (such as milking goats, making cheese, or horse riding) were also novel attractions for these tourists. Annie stated that rural areas were her primary destination in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Cities in Aotearoa/New Zealand did not hold the same potential for novelty: *'...I didn't really come here to stay in Auckland really... or to be in Wellington or to be in a city'*.

All of the research participants said that the mainstream backpacking route tended to contain backpackers in a way that prevented them from meeting local residents or visit tourist free spaces. This containment was the very antithesis of their wish to meet local people. They found that they were only meeting the same people (often from their own country of origin) in the hostels as they travelled around the tourist circuits. This was illustrated by Clive, who said:

"When I was travelling... on a bus from hostel to hostel (I was) just kind of meeting the same English people... and just going round this whole circuit, and ...although I've seen a lot of the country I feel as though my experience there...was just kind of on the surface...everything was provided for you as a tourist".

All participants joined WWOOF because it provided an opportunity for them to escape from the restrictive backpacker circuit, and to meet and live with local residents. Annie observed: *Going into peoples home.... that's like a character study.... that's the best way to learn about them, to live with them.'* Maria felt that the best way to *'get to know a country'*, is if *'...you get to know the people who live in it'*.

Annie welcomed the opportunity to meet people from other cultures on an everyday basis, because it enabled her to learn about them in a way that did not *'objectify'* people or their culture:

"That ...would be ... why I'm travelling because.... you can meet people from cultures so it's not such a shock and you're not.... so fascinated with... the cover of someone's culture...

that they bring with them...The attraction to another culture is ... shallow because...on a real person level, ...you can't have a relationship with someone else's culture. But that has to do with... putting things on a pedestal and idealism, and that doesn't really work. (WWOOF)...takes another culture off a pedestal because you're living in someone's house and you... see how they live".

Most research participants welcomed the opportunity to explore the differences between their culture of origin and that which they encountered in WWOOF homes. For example, Lee observed that the practice of using honorifics was quite different between New Zealanders and Korean people. Perhaps because his culture of origin was the most starkly different from that of WWOOF hosts, he also mentioned some very mundane day to day cultural practices that the other research participants did not refer to (possibly because their own practices were similar enough to their hosts so as not to notice). Some of Lee's observations included the different ways New Zealanders and Koreans wash dishes, and that New Zealanders stand at a barbecue, and Koreans sit. Lee's comments about the different ways in which Korean people and New Zealanders wash their dishes demonstrates that WWOOF enabled him to participate in very ordinary day to day tasks and experiences which would not have been available to him had he confined his travel experiences to the backpacker circuit.

WWOOF also provided access to experiences that would not have been available through the tourism industry. For example, Shuggie participated in a *'stirring'*, in which the whole neighbourhood turned out to assist with the application of a biodynamic solution on her host's farm. Joyce attended a powhiri, which welcomed a First Nations medicine man onto a local marae, and was also taken sailing around the Bay of Islands by some friends of her hosts. Clive visited the Mystery Creek agricultural show with his host, which was not something he would have ordinarily done if he had remained on the backpacking route. These kinds of activities which provide access to *'real New Zealanders'*, unusual experiences, and at little or no cost were particularly appreciated by the research participants

Interviews with WWOOFers indicates that the cultural exchange facilitated by WWOOF can contain elements that not only contribute towards increasing sensitivity towards other cultures (on behalf of the tourist and the host), but also extends into a positive contribution to the host community. Sam's observations on his experience of cultural exchange through WWOOF are framed within a commitment to reciprocity:

"Because I came in knowing nothing, or the feeling that I knew nothing, and really I didn't have much to offer as far as knowledge goes. But I do... have labour, I can go in and offer skills, and a brain that works sometimes, and to help out, in that way. So that's what would be my sharing a little bit. But also I've had just, amazing conversations and it takes two people to have a good conversation, so I can go away from that feeling that at least I've shared somewhat, ... sharing a little bit of my world view, and what experience I can from my country to this country... And then there's the sharing I get back, there's obviously the education, and the experience I get being here, getting to meet people. And I think sharing in a more holistic sense, sharing lives. I'm touching their lives, and they're touching my life, and it's a willingness to share your life with somebody else... that real sharing has been wonderful".

A quality which underlies this kind of positive, reciprocal cultural exchange between WWOOF hosts and WWOOFers is related to the tendency that cross-cultural empathy is more likely to occur when tourist contact is more than a short and

commercial encounter. Unlike conventional tourism, WWOOF hosts and WWOOFers have the opportunity to spend considerable time with each other. This allows them to explore the differences and similarities between cultures, challenge stereotypes, and uncover subtleties. It also creates opportunities for WWOOFers to extend cultural exchange beyond increased sensitivity to reciprocity.

Belonging to WWOOF not only reflects some travel motivations, but it can also alter the political awareness of backpackers or encourage a shift in their world view. Rachel joined WWOOF with the intention to learn organic farming and permaculture so she could teach it in developing countries. However, after living and working in WWOOF farms, the emphasis of her political analysis shifted, to refocus on her home country.

"America is one of the worst countries... (T)he corporations... go from our country, they just spread this poison around the world, and...then I thought well maybe just going to different countries and teaching... them sustainable agriculture isn't the right tactic. Maybe we should start in my own country and try and stop the core (of destruction)".

Instead of simply being a means by which to learn about organics, WWOOF became for Rachel a site of subversive activity and politics: *'WWOOFing poses a threat, it's a source of education, and education is power, and ultimately it's the people who are the ones that are going to have to change the way things are'*.

Working on WWOOF farms can heighten backpackers awareness of the environment and environmental issues. After spending a week by herself working on an organic farm, Annie found that she wanted to *'make a pact'* with the Earth, and be *'... sensitive to the plants in the rain forest.'* The immediacy of eating the food she had helped grow and working in a farm environment enhanced her knowledge about how the natural environment sustains human life through the production of food.

"(I)t just makes you more aware of places that support life, and... you're aware that (is) important. (B)ecause in the city you're not aware that's important because you don't care because the supermarket supports life. So what difference does it make to you if... a forest is burned".

Annie also stated that staying on WWOOF farms changed some of her ideas about the nature of food itself.

"I look at food differently. And cooking goes along with it.... and cooking the food that you grow is just amazing.... I learned that you can go out into a garden and eat the weeds that are living there. And that you can eat food that you don't buy at a supermarket".

One of the reasons Sam, Christine, Rachel and Anahata joined WWOOF was to learn about alternative lifestyle technologies (such as solar power or wind power) or organic farming techniques. Anahata hoped that WWOOF would help him *'...find my green fingers, if they exist'*. None of these people had any particular skill or skills in mind they wanted to learn when they joined WWOOF. Instead, they conveyed openness to anything they could learn.

A unique aspect of the learning experiences offered by WWOOF is that it exposes workers to issues about organic farming that extends beyond organic farming techniques. WWOOFers are able to observe the emotional commitment that is required to develop an organic property, and the different ways farmers either create, or avoid, 'burnout'. Some of their idealism and romanticism about rural lifestyles was stripped away when they discovered just how much commitment and hard work is required to develop an organic property. Christine commented: *'I've learnt that it's not at all an easy option to be sustainable - you don't have the creature comforts which you*

usually have'. Whilst these observations did not seem to discourage the research participants from organic farming or a rural lifestyles entirely, it certainly led them to review their own plans with a changed, more realistic perspective.

As illustrated above, WWOOFers join WWOOF for many reasons. The majority of travel motivations relevant to backpackers joining WWOOF are micro pull motivations. However, macro push and pull travel motivations, and micro push motivations are no less significant. The categories used to determine travel motivations of backpackers do not necessarily convey their complexity. Each research participant had their own unique set of travel motivations, which varied in number. These interrelationships can influence the interactions between WWOOFers and hosts. The existence of such interrelationships implies that each backpacker will enter a WWOOF home with a unique, sophisticated set of needs, which may or may not be met by WWOOF hosts. To a certain degree, this will determine the "success" of the time spent by backpackers in WWOOF homes.

A general level of analysis reveals that there are two different 'kinds' of WWOOFers. All research participants shared one travel motivation in common, and this was to meet and live with 'New Zealanders'. One 'type' of WWOOFer is specifically interested in environmental issues, which is usually accompanied by a political analysis of, and a need to escape from, industrial urbanised societies and their economic systems. They specifically seek out farms that pursue alternative lifestyles and employ organic farming techniques.

The other 'type' of WWOOFer does not have the same critical political analysis. Instead, they are more like 'mainstream' backpackers, because they emphasise a preference for recreational activities, or the desire to experience novel activities. However, even though they did not express a dislike for cities, or extend their analysis into wider political and cultural conditions, these backpackers distance themselves from mainstream backpackers (and other tourists) by stating that they did not like 'partying', and/or that mainstream backpackers were not necessarily interested in learning about other cultures.

Effective Microorganisms Conference

In January Vince Wiles and Jim O'Gorman attended the NZ Nature Farming Society's 7th International Conference in Christchurch. Jim's report from the conference follows:

Thank you for the opportunity to represent WWOOF at the 7th International EM and Kyusei Nature Farming conference.

The depth and variety of experiences, fully documented and well researched was overwhelming. In a nutshell, this stuff works mate!

I promised that I would observe proceedings from the perspective of an Organic practitioner and my report follows that vein. I write with my own interests in mind for I discovered at this conference, across countries, across climates and across crops; if producers combine common-sense sustainable practices with Effective Microorganism (EM) technology they can't go wrong.

At the end of the first session, I couldn't help wondering if I hadn't stumbled onto a magic elixir but as the day progressed it was constantly reinforced that EM, far from being magic, is in fact fundamental to sound organic principles on broad-acre

and intensive cropping scales alike.

"Perhaps I have unlocked the door to nature's ice-cream parlour" was my thought when I first discovered microbial activity in my soil. My experiences from applying the Biointensive method are entirely congruent with the work of Rudolf Steiner and Lady Eve Balfour, two of the early proponents of the value of microorganisms. I feel affirmed in my approach in spite of current organic dogma which leans towards the no dig approach. From what I have observed at this conference, proponents of this method are out of touch with the reality faced by farmers, especially those who would benefit most from the application of a no-dig culture. The best example of this was a presentation which identified these problems. How can you expect a village to create a compost or a mulch layer when all the animal dung is cooking fuel and all mulching material is stock food?

Regardless of crop or country, the effective application of EM is constantly showing positive results. Understanding and applying the five underlying principles of Kyusei Nature Farming cannot help but encourage one to meditate on the processes one is witness to. Such processes are necessary if we are to recover the damaged soils of our Planet and feed tomorrow's people. However you look at it the message is constant: It works Mate!

On day two I thought there would be little to interest me. My focus is not on municipal waste. I was nothing short of astounded. At a session chaired by the Mayor of Mackay in Queensland, Australia, we heard how the municipal waste stream at remote locations is manageable and cost effective with the application of EM. And the end product of the process is "washdown" water. Not potable quality, but still a resource in a dry area which lessens the demand for fresh water and lowers its cost. It does not stop there. Jefferson City in Missouri USA has, or rather had, a problem with smell from its effluent disposal system which is located only streets away from the State Capitol buildings. Not any more. EM technology has not only taken away the smell it is cleaning up the local waste water environment all the way to the Missouri river. In Japan it was shown that EM has been used to clean badly polluted waterways which are now teeming with fish life again after many years absence.

Then on to wider experiences. From helping villagers recover their lands in India to experiences in tropical Brazil the message is the same. Effective microorganisms and Kyusei Nature Farming really work. The message is constantly reinforced.

Day three was the time I was looking forward to. A chance to visit and talk with users of EM in NZ and to observe first hand, the results of this wonder process.

I asked the value of the small golden fungi which abounded in a squash patch and was assured that this fungi activity is one sure indicator that you are getting it right. I thought this was great news for I observe the same fungi as part of the biointensive system. At this point I could have turned my back on EM, thinking I was getting it right because I was achieving the same results without it. That would have been a mistake. A vegetable grower who has been using microorganisms technology for years (even well before the advent of EM) says that the application of EM helps balance microbial activity in the soil. Although he does not experience a direct gain in yield, the production unit is better off with the application of EM technology. It is not a magic elixir. Rather, when coupled with Kyusei Nature Farming, it provides keys to unlock the door to sustainable agriculture.

Jim O'Gorman.

Wwoofing In Italy

Thomas Taptiklis shares his experiences...

The first farm I went to was a couple of hours from Rome, in the Appenine mountains. I learnt about pruning olives and grape vines, about making some delicious wine, about permaculture, and ironically for a Kiwi, I learnt how to shear sheep for the first time. I was introduced to all their friends and within a week of arriving in the country I'd shared dinner with five local and gorgeously 'rustic' families. I hope that doesn't sound condescending, because it's certainly not supposed to. Everything I do when I travel is to avoid being bundled along to all the tourist sites that we're 'supposed' to see. Thanks to Wwoofing I couldn't have done a better job. The host family took me on holidays with them, took me on several skiing expeditions, rock-climbing, mountain-climbing, out to innumerable restaurants, and Ice-cream shops. They also taught Tai Chi and Yoga, and happily took me to all their classes. A fun thing was that it was always a good moment for an impromptu Tai Chi lesson, which usually involved the farmer trying to push me off whatever I was standing on. He took me all over Italy so we could attend the Tai Chi seminars, and I ended up friends with the Grand Master

of Italy, which was fairly unexpected!

Here's a list of the best things I learnt from it:

-By the time I left I had a host of fantastic friends who I've been back to visit 3 times, when previously I had known no one in the country.

-I learnt the language pretty damn well!

-I discovered what I want to do with the rest of my life - start my own organic permaculture farm in Aotearoa!

At the start of 2001 I worked on another farm, near the Austrian border, high in the Dolomites. Here I learnt how to milk cows, make lots of different cheeses, and how to make Bach flower remedies. Both families I stayed with were more-than welcoming, and tried really hard to make my stay as enjoyable as possible. Admittedly it wasn't all cheese and raspberries. Almost every farm is fighting an enormous uphill financial battle, and as a result we all had to work really hard, sometimes as much as 14 hours a day. But I always felt that it was my farm too, and some things just have to get done. It was a pretty wonderful experience, with thousands of hilarious moments, usually revolving around them trying to marry me off to anyone they could find who was vaguely eligible. It was really worthwhile, and I'll do it again as soon as I get a chance. I'd recommend Wwoofing to anyone, and I already have to thousands of people I've met. A fantastic way to meet like-minded people. Well, I don't know if I could sing any higher praise. Almost all of my friends have done it too, somewhere around the world, so we all have heaps of crazy stories about Wwoofing adventures to share.

That's my tale.

Thomas Taptiklis

(For Wwoof overseas go to www.woof.co.nz/overseas)