

Tea Shelter 1949 – Akatarawa Road Birchville

The Tea Shelter (kiosk / rotunda) is situated on Akatarawa Road in Birchville. The shelter was erected by the Tea Bureau (NZ) Company and donated to the Ministry of Works. The official handing over ceremony was held on Saturday 10 December 1949. In 2019 the building was still standing on the same site as it had done for the last 70 years.

The Upper Hutt City Council commissioned Boffa Miskell Limited to study and report on the Heritage buildings in the Upper Hutt district. The report was completed and submitted to the Council in December 1995. The results of their study on the Tea Shelter reads;

“UHCC Heritage No 24 U1 Tea Bureau Rotunda Very unusual facility, donated by international consortium of tea producers, to the Ministry of Works and Development, 1949 multiple fireplaces (x8) in which people are meant to brew tea to protect local forests from fire damage National / Local”.

(Reference Ecology Heritage Verification Study for Upper Hutt City Council Boffa Miskell Limited report December 1995)



(Reference Google Maps Birchville Picnic Area Akatarawa)

Otago Daily Times newspaper 09 December 1949

Roadside Amenity - A public fireplace tea shelter has been built by the roadside on the Akatarawa road about one mile from the Brown Owl junction at Upper Hutt. It stands in a small clearing near a river and has a low wall surround is roofed, and contains eight fireplaces. This novel amenity for motorists was built by the Tea Bureau and is designed to eliminate fire risk. Senior Scouts and Rovers of the Upper Hutt district will carry out simple maintenance of the shelter and the Highways Board has offered to keep kindling stock supplied. The shelter will be given to the Ministry of Works at a ceremony on Saturday.

(Reference Papers past website Otago Daily Times newspaper 09 December 1949)

Bay of Plenty Times newspaper Saturday 10 December 1949

Fireplace Tea Shelter for use of Hutt Valley Motorists - First of its kind in New Zealand a fireplace tea shelter for the use of picnic parties and travellers will be formally opened at Akatarawa tomorrow afternoon. This amenity has been donated by the Tea Bureau and has been built by the roadside on the Akatarawa Road at a point about one mile from the Brown Bowl junction at Upper Hutt. It stands in a small clearing among the trees and has easy access to the river from which fresh water may be obtained for brewing billy tea. The structure has been specially designed to fit in with the landscape and a low wall made of boulders from the river surrounds the concrete base. The wall prevents sparks or ashes from the eight fireplaces in the centre of the shelter from causing any damage. The roofing has a chimney vent above the fireplaces and provides protection to the nearby tree branches. A novel structural method has been adopted in order to make provision for earthquake and wind loading. The Tea Bureau had the co-operation of the Highways Board and the Automobile Association in the project and the site chosen was considered to be the most suitable for the shelter in view of its summertime popularity as a picnic spot. The Boy Scouts of the Upper Hutt district have offered to carry out simple maintenance duties. They will tidy up the shelter and the surround and keep the fireplaces clean and arrangements have been made for supplies of kindling wood to be maintained.

(Reference Papers past website Bay of Plenty Times newspaper 10 December 1949)

Gisborne Herald newspaper 13 December 1949

Tea Shelter for Motorists - The first fire place tea shelter in New Zealand was handed over on Saturday. The shelter is designed to provide facilities for motorists and campers who wish to boil the billy and to ensure that the tires will be in a safe place. The fire place has been built by the roadside on the Akatarawa road about one mile from the Brown Owl junction at Upper Hutt. There are eight fireplaces built in the centre of a concrete base surrounded by a boulder wall. The roofing has a chimney vent above the fire places to provide protection to the nearby tree branches. The Main Highways Board will endeavour to maintain a small supply of kindling wood and the senior Boy Scouts and Rovers of the Upper Hutt district have offered to carry out simple maintenance.

(Reference Papers past website Gisborne Herald newspaper 13 December 1949)

Upper Hutt Leader 20 January 1955

They say what do they say by the man in the street - That the "tea shelter" should be used there for lighting fires as we noticed that fires had been lit in the bush which is just asking for trouble.

(Reference Upper Hutt City Council Upper Hutt Leader 20 January 1955)

Upper Hutt Leader 17 February 1955

Lost between Birchville Tea shelter and Upper Hutt pair of brown roman sandals size 8 please ring 4402

(Reference Upper Hutt City Library website Upper Hutt Leader 17 February 1955)

Upper Hutt Leader 19 January 1956

NZR Road Services Akatarawa Bus Terminus – As from Saturday 21st January 1956 the terminus for Akatarawa buses will be extended to the Tea Shelter.

(Reference Upper Hutt City Council Upper Hutt Leader 19 January 1956)

Upper Hutt Leader 01 November 1956

Northern District Plunket Mother's Club – Barbecue and Eeling Competition at Akatarawa Tea Shelter on Saturday 10 November at 7.30 pm – Supper provided bring your own lines Rickets can be obtained from Maidstone Mild Bar, Novelty Book Shop and McGhie's Paint Shop or Ring Secretary 5993 – Bus leaves Railway Station at 7.45 pm return at 11.30 pm – Tickets 2/-

(Reference Upper Hutt City Council Upper Hutt Leader 01 November 1956)