

## A Day in the Life of a Trapper Extraordinaire

By Claire Taggart

Tramping and climbing are in the Heine's blood. As I huffed and puffed up the one hundred steep steps to their house, tuis flew past me, chortling in the kowhai trees beside the path and when I dared look up I was enchanted by the 'literally' breathtaking view of Day's Bay and Wellington Harbour that Jan Heine and her husband Arnold wake up to every morning.

Their house in Day's Bay backs on to another part of paradise, the Northern Forest block of the East Harbour Regional Park.



*Jan Heine and her good friend Sheila Natusch.*

As Arnold is now in his early 90s his days of clambering around in the bush are limited but we were able to keep a track of his whereabouts in the house as he made Lady Grey tea in the kitchen, served the cake I had brought with me to share, found reference material and books and contributed keenly to the conversation. I was having a 'bliss' moment. Tea, cake, sharing time with some extra-ordinary people, views of our beautiful harbour and bay, the smell and sight of books, books, books and intelligent, interesting conversation. We were trying to summarise a lifetime of achievement into a short article. 'A Day in the Life of a Trapper' is just a teeny, tiny segment of Jan's life.

Jan and her husband Arnold are two of the original MIRO trappers. MIRO's beginnings are succinctly captured in early newsletters and articles found on the MIRO website: <http://www.miro.org.nz>. This is a story in itself. From those early days in 1996, they have been trapping for over twenty years. This is an entire lifetime for my daughter, half of my own life and just a smidgen of Jan's.

Jan starts out from her back garden and it is from here that she heads into the bush to check on her trap lines. In the 'old days' Jan's trap line encompassed 38 traps. This arduous task involved tramping solidly up steep ridgelines and down into deep gullies, for around 4-5 hours at a time. For some this is a daunting, sweat-producing thought, for others this is a physical joy.

The tramp time varied depending on what was found at each trap site. Sometimes pigs had decided to pay homage to a carcass caught in a trap and the entire trap had been pulled through the bush and generally found dislodged against a fallen tree trunk, sometimes many metres from the original trap site.

Traps constantly need rebaiting, and some are brought back for repair, as the salty air corrodes springs, and cause bits to break. The rat bait tubes often need cleaning out if the baits have deteriorated and turned to sludge (especially during winter rains). The caps of some tubes have rodent teeth marks and once one tube was rendered useless as rats had

chewed a large hole through the base of the tube, so keen were they to get to the bait. Partly decomposed carcasses, especially of hedgehogs, are difficult to remove which means those gloves are needed.

Stoat traps catch more rats than stoats, hopefully that does mean fewer stoat numbers in mid-Gollans valley. On Jan's line these are DOC200 traps and they need strong hands and training provided by MIRO gurus. The lure used is squashed rabbit.

Currently Jan is looking after only 18 traps, which stretch over an area down into Gollans valley and loop around, covering an area that only takes her 3-4 hours now, of solid tramping! She does share the job with friends these days, helpful when either party is away. Maybe it is a tramping club measurement but her line is not measured in kilometres, rather by hours and 'climbs'. An example of a 'climb' is a 300 metre steep incline.

On her trap line checking days Jan likes to start out at about 9.00am but getting the gear together takes time, and she always checks off her list. Careful packing encompasses: Water, high visibility jacket, something to eat, baits, lures, gloves, bags to contain mouldy baits, hand sanitiser, notebook and pencil/pen, screwdriver, parka, beanie (sunhats are not much use in the bush).

On a 'good' day nothing is caught, and although in some ways disappointing, this may show that nothing is 'out there' to be caught, either that or the animals are trap shy. But a trap is useless if there is an animal in it so they do need checking. Jan removes 'mouldies', and replaces baits, because mouldy baits are not a rat's preferred diet.

All carcasses are removed and disposed of, and catches are recorded. Trapping is not for the squeamish. You do become slightly hardened to the process but in itself is not a pleasant experience except it means one less possum to devastate the forest or rat to raid a nest. The joy comes from being outdoors in nature, listening to the birds and the sound of the trees talking, the satisfaction of having made a difference to the pest numbers. To be part of something bigger than ourselves.

Jan's philosophy is that if you really believe in something and want it to happen, you cannot wait for someone else to do it. Everyone is responsible. We can all do something, even if it is one small thing. One small thing carried out by one million people, makes one million things. Both Jan and Arnold commented that their initial driver wasn't 'environmental impact'. It was the enjoyment of being out in the bush. It was being able to "roam freely in the forest with a purpose"!

Jan is a busy lady. I wonder if she actually sleeps. I know she dreams. Her face lights up as she talks about the future - connecting children and students to the wonder and beauty of their own back yard. The new generations to take over. She is witnessing and participating in the exciting world of technical savvy. This leads to succession planning, an intergenerational shift. Environmentally we need to think globally. With a twinkle in her eye she tells me she is looking forward to research that produces an artificial essence of stoat and essence of rat.

As I was leaving, a newspaper headline caught my eye in amongst some of the reference material Arnold produced – **1969 “Mrs Heine driving force behind Hutt Valley Conservation”**.

Today Jan is a much deserved and proud recipient of a **2017 Civic Award for Community Services**. In between these dates are fifty years of hard work, dedication and many thousands of steps of booted foot effort.

I leave you with a quote I think pertains strongly to Jan and Arnold, to the MIRO volunteers and the ERAT project volunteers and all the other thousands of volunteers out there that get up each day and do their ‘one small thing’.

*“Some people dream of success, while other people get up every morning and make it happen”.*  
*Wayne Huizenga*