

Rainbow Valley and Tui Communities

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Introduction

Rainbow Valley and Tui Communities are located in Golden Bay, in the northwest corner of New Zealand's South Island. Founded in 1974, Rainbow is ten years older than Tui, and owns more land, but Tui is the better known and larger of the two communities. At the time of writing nine members and ten non-members live at Rainbow, while twenty members and twenty-five non-members live at Tui. At Rainbow land is vested in a company. At Tui it is vested in a trust.

Much has been written about overseas intentional communities, not very much about New Zealand's own, though Lucy Sargisson and Lyman Tower Sargent see New Zealand as containing an unusually large number of stable and mature ones, and even speculate that we have more intentional communities per capita than any other country.¹ Seeing New Zealand itself as utopian perhaps inclines them to believe it has the most utopian experiments.² Most groups described as communes in the 1970s now see themselves as intentional communities. In this paper, for simplicity and brevity, I use the blanket term community. To the extent that Sargisson and Sargent believe members of communities like Rainbow and Tui are living in utopia because they want a finished, perfect world,³ Sargisson and Sargent are out of touch with the reality: few if any believe a perfect world is possible, and most are gritty realists who relish change and want to play a part in it. But the concluding chapter of *Living in Utopia* provides a different definition: utopia, it seems, is "social dreaming", dreaming of or desiring a better life. "In most cases utopias do not suggest that every problem will be solved."⁴ This is a radical redefinition and most dictionaries do not agree with it.⁵ If utopians simply wanted a better way of life, not only members of communities but everybody else as well would be utopians.

Here I describe these two communities, explaining where they are, how they were formed, their structures, and the life of each from its inception to the present day.

My outlines draw on my personal experience, a variety of primary and secondary sources, and twelve interviews conducted in 2010 with resident members of Rainbow and Tui.

¹ Sargisson, Lucy and Lyman Tower Sargent, *Living in Utopia : New Zealand's intentional communities*, Aldershot, England; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004.preface, xv.

² Ibid, "this beautiful and abundant land has been, for many, a place in which to try and create a utopia"

³ Ibid, p. xiii: "Utopia is the good place that is no place"

⁴ Ibid, p. 159

⁵ e.g. "*Utopia* An ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects." retrieved 9 February 2011 from www.thefreedictionary.com/utopia

Rainbow

Rainbow is situated at Glover's Flat, on the Anatoki River, and borders Kahurangi National Park. The road from Takaka winds through three kilometres of bushy gorge to reach it. By car the journey into town takes twenty minutes. There was a brief gold rush there in 1857. Much later, in the 1940s, the Holmwood family owned the land, and kept it until the 1970s. Farmers and saw-millers, they ran a saw-mill there. Rainbow's Main-house was later built on the abandoned site. Across the river is a track to nearby Handcock Falls.

In 1973 three couples in the United States planned a back to the land venture in New Zealand, though all but one of them were US citizens. They saw New Zealand as a better place for raising families than Nixon's USA and they agreed to pool resources and to farm there as a group. By US standards they were not particularly rich, but in New Zealand, by their standards, land was cheap.

Peter, the one New Zealander, and partner Mary Jane came to NZ and began the search. At Waitati, a village near Dunedin, they met Bill and Carol, a New Zealand couple who were also interested in living on the land. In June of 1974, Lynn and Jim rendezvoused with Peter and Mary Jane in Golden Bay. A Land Agent then showed them Glovers Flat. Its Holmwood owner, who was moving to Australia, had put it on the market only days before.

They bought 103 hectares for NZ \$25,000. There were few fences and the only pre-existing structure was a barn. About 26 hectares of flat land were accessible by road. Another 37 hectares lay on Roses Flat across the river; much of that was bush and gorse. The other 40-hectare block was steep and forested. Lynn chose the new name Rainbow Valley when they first explored the land, so Rainbow Valley Company Ltd. was formed to be the partners' legal entity, and they were equal shareholders. In midwinter they moved into the barn. The third couple were not allowed to immigrate, which left \$5,000 owing on the land. This was made up by loans from newfound friends. One was Mike Scott, a friend of Bill and Carol, who with others had begun to publish Mushroom Magazine. Peter and Jim found jobs at Golden Bay Cement. Looking ahead to self-sufficiency, the founding couples put in a half-acre garden at the barn.

Alternative communities were the coming thing. New Zealand's Ohu scheme was underway, and Tim Jones, gathering material for his book *A Hard Won Freedom*, visited twice in 1974 and saw Rainbow's potential as enormous.⁶ Son Simon joined in 1976. Bill and Carol, with their new baby Jamie, visited in late 1974, the first of Rainbow's current members to arrive. In that first summer, when a local newspaper announced "substandard accommodation" at the Rainbow barn, it sparked a battle with the local council over housing that would last for years. The council gave the hippies notice to vacate the barn, and Jim made plans for the new house to which they were entitled; only one, since the then district scheme made no provision for communities.

In 1975 Bill, Carol, and another Kiwi couple became Rainbow shareholders. Also that year a group mainly from Christchurch, the Happisam Trucking Company, bought land adjoining Rainbow's to the south and east. Since many locals viewed the rowdy Happisammers, with their drugs and rock and roll, as threatening Golden Bay's respectable community, Rainbow's young families feared for their reputation if the two were seen as one. At first both groups tended to stress their differences, but the relationship has since improved.

When Simon came in 1976 he was with Carol. Robyn arrived with two daughters and soon teamed up with Bill. Other new members came, including Anne and partner Gregor, but 1977 was a year of change. Peter and Mary Jane no longer wanted to be part of the community and so the other members had to buy them out. And Jim and Lynn returned to the United States, leaving their house to the community, it is the Main-house now. They also left their money in the company, enabling Rainbow's second wave of members to retain the land.

By 1983 the council had reluctantly agreed to six more building permits, all sleep-outs to the one permissible Main-house. But those restrictive regulations were about to change. Rainbow was not the only place in Golden Bay where home-made housing had been springing up. A Rural Resettlement Association had formed, calling for change, and by 1983 the District Scheme was altered. Under new provisions Rainbow was able to apply for recognition as a Rural Commune and was granted it.

⁶ Jones, Tim and Ian Baker, *A Hard-won Freedom: Alternative Communities in New Zealand*, Auckland, Hodder and Stoughton, 1975, p.72

Rainbow's farm has never been financially profitable, but it has provided milk, mutton and beef. In 1981, five members started up a sewing business: Rainbow Wares. It manufactured toys and clothing mostly out of possum fur. In 1986 the business closed, and since that time most members have found part time work outside, often in Takaka.

Alongside equal sharing of the land,⁷ Rainbow believed in shared decision-making. At first the members thought they could and should agree on everything. At meetings held in the Main-house consensus was at first the norm, although it slowed decisions down. Minutes of meetings were recorded in successive minute books, and the agreements reached were seen as contracts, since in theory every member was on board with them. Not until 1990 did these agreements come together in one document. The only formal meeting was the AGM required by the Companies Act. Until 2003 it was believed the company would soon be superseded by a trust.⁸

A process for new membership evolved that took a minimum of fifteen months. Unanimous approval by existing members was the hurdle would-be members ultimately faced.⁹ This process did make joining Rainbow slow and difficult, but once completed it did not ensure new and old members always got along. In order to become a shareholder, new members had to pay a fee, and after doing so were issued equal packets of 100 shares. This fee was set at first at \$3000 and for many years did not increase. Eventually it did, in an attempt to match inflation so that later contributions would equate to earlier ones. But under old agreements shares were never seen as an investment and those who left or died were meant to give them back to the community. For the first thirty years new members could pay incrementally, as building houses needed money too. Such payments were negotiable and were designed to be affordable, but shares were never issued until the fee was fully paid.

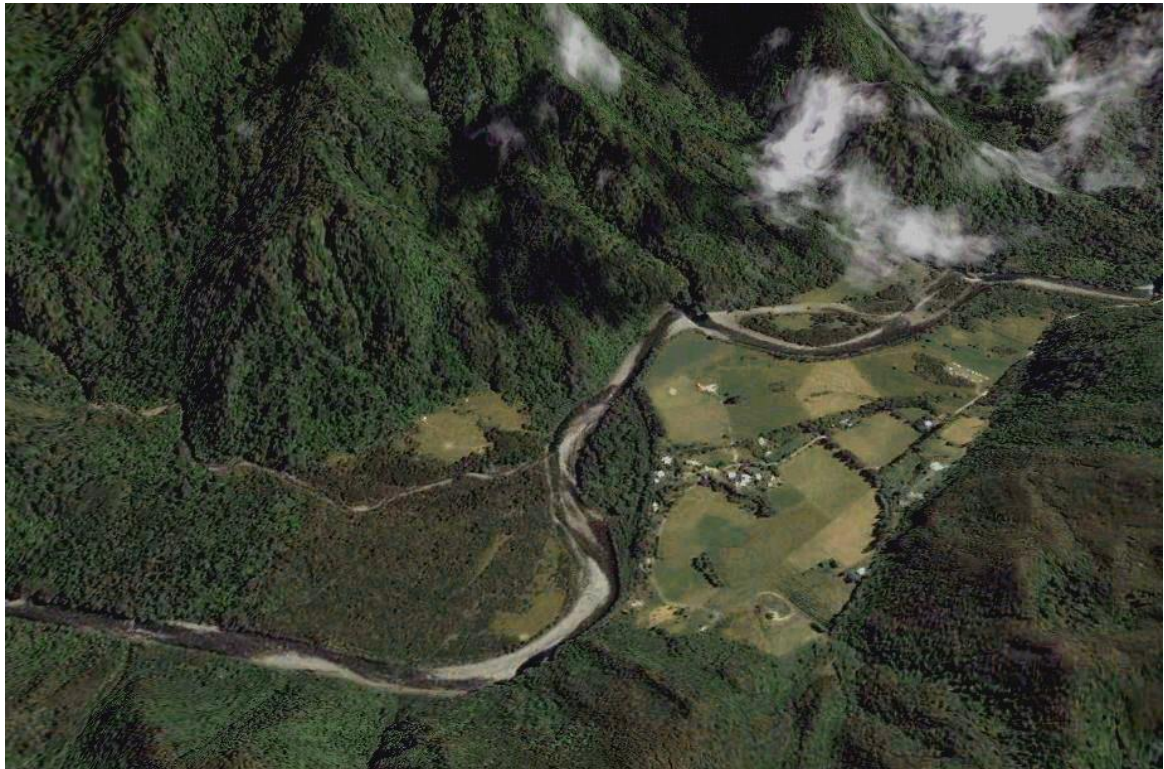
⁷ Rainbow Valley Community Agreements, 1992, p. 1: Rainbow Valley land is to remain communally owned, with no individual owning any specific portion of it. It will not be sold.

⁸ Ibid, p.4: We have begun and intend to complete the involved process of transferring this legal identity to a Registered Trust, yet to be formed.

⁹ Ibid, p.2: The process of becoming a Member involves the following sequence of events: Staying as a long-term visitor for a minimum of three months, paying the relevant charge. Making formal application for Provisional Membership; the minimum period of provisional membership is one year. Making formal application for full Membership; membership begins when consensus is reached and the decision recorded in the Minutes Book. Members are entitled to 100 shares in the Rainbow Valley Co. Ltd when their Membership fee is fully paid. This is solely to allow Members to feel legally secure. The shares are not an investment. They are to be returned in the event of death.

The number of members has stayed between eight and twelve since the early 1980s. There are nine member residents now, and ten long-term residents who are not members. Seven of the nine members have lived at Rainbow more than twenty years, and five have been there since the 1970s. All but two are New Zealand born and those two are Australia born but have lived in New Zealand all their adult lives. So Rainbow's membership is stable and committed, and culturally it is unusually homogeneous. A lot of Rainbow's adult children still return for holidays, some bringing grandchildren. Though Rainbow has succeeded in creating an extended family, only one member's child lives there now and just one current member-resident is less than fifty-five. Rainbow has now decided to remain a company, to lease out land, and to allow the sale of shares. Member-residents hope these major changes, made in 2010, will help bring in new members, so ensuring a continuing community.

Rainbow Valley



Tui

Wainui Bay lies to the east of Golden Bay, where the Wainui River joins the sea. In 1642 the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman anchored in Wainui Bay. After it passes the Wainui Estuary, the road from Takaka to Totaranui climbs into the hills of Abel Tasman National Park. Before it does a gravel road leads north from it to Tui land.

Following that road, the first Tui building to appear is the Tui Balms plant and office on the left. Behind it are grassy paddocks, Tui's grazing land. Further on a stand of trees largely conceals the Eventspark, which lies between the road and estuary. East of the road are Tui's houses, gardens and orchards. Most Tui houses are on flat land near the road or in a little eastern valley by a stream; a few are perched on hillsides. Trees screen them all, and the community blends into the surrounding land. Tui has fifty hectares. Roughly half is flat and lies between the road and estuary. East of the road most of the property consists of wooded hills.

Takaka is twelve kilometres to the southwest, but twice as far by road. When Abel Tasman National Park was formed in 1942 the hills from Wainui to Separation Point were not a part of it. An English immigrant, John Crockford, farmed those hills for twenty years, then sold them to the National Park. When he retired in 1984 he sold the fifty hectares he had left to Tui, and his house, which has become Tui's Community House.

In January 1983 about 300 people came together at a weeklong gathering called Whetu Marama o Te Ata (bright morning star), in Baton Valley near Motueka. Robina McCurdy, who facilitated Whetu Marama, saw its kaupapa¹⁰ as beginning at Parihaka. In 1870, Parihaka in Taranaki was New Zealand's largest Maori settlement. Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi, its spiritual and political leaders, forbade war and condemned violence. Robina hoped to form a new non-violent land-based community and school of life also based partly on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner. Zvonne, a Yugoslavian, responded eagerly. Many of Tui's founders would, like him, be recent immigrants seeking a peaceful and holistic way of life. Almost half were German. and the rest mainly New Zealanders. A planning group was formed and nearby Riverside Community provided mentoring. In February 1984 a core group chose to live together in a rented house near Tapawera while

¹⁰ 'Plan, scheme, proposal': Williams, Herbert W, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language*, Wellington: P.D. Hasselberg. Government Printer, 1985, p.107

they looked for land. This was the Tui Tadmire phase, a trial time in which they sorted out ideals, experimented with sharing money, decided on a legal structure, and co-parented.¹¹ By October they had decided on the Crockford property and pooled their assets in order to buy it.

The Tui Land Trust, formed for the broad purposes of landcare, holistic education and healing, took possession of the land, and on December 13th a group of 13 adults and their children, in an assortment of mobile homes and other vehicles, made the move to Wainui Bay. Soon afterwards they drew up a broad zoning plan and applied for recognition as a rural community under the now amended District Scheme. They received permission for up to 16 dwellings and five sleep-outs, with an eventual maximum of 60 residents. Conditions were imposed, including the provision of a sewerage scheme and settling pond.

Two of the first communal projects were a large organic garden and a kindergarten. It was a time when anything seemed possible; whatever Tui dreamed it could create. It chose not to create a separate school, joining instead the larger school community of Motupipi, on the way to Takaka. The first new house was designed and built by Reinhardt and Jutta Fuchs, who later moved to Auckland where their 'Bio-Building' has been nationally recognised. More houses sprung up rapidly and there are now fifteen. New members, as at Rainbow, need to be accepted by consensus of existing members. Then, after paying a negotiated fee, they can become trustees, and can own houses but not land. They may sell houses only to other trustees..

Tui hosts many groups and workshops. In 1996 Jim Horton called for a Mens' Gathering to foster male bonding in a tribal way. Although his background was in North America, Jim felt connected to earlier Maori tribes through the karaka groves that they had planted, and the tribe of Tui men became the Karaka Tribe. Mens' Gatherings led to 'Gender Gatherings', held annually and open to outside participants. Now there are also 'Tracks' and 'Tides' events providing "rites of passage" for those teenage boys and girls who wish to be involved. Permaculture, Deep Ecology and a variety of personal growth and creativity workshops are also held at Tui. In 2000 the Tui Land Trust renamed itself the

¹¹ McCurdy, Robina. 'Towards a Sacred Society' in *Creating harmony: conflict resolution in community* Hildur Jackson (ed.), Holte: Gaia Trust, 1999. pp. 116-117

Tui Spiritual and Educational Trust, acknowledging a greater focus on such outreach work.

The Tui Balms business began in 1985 when a beekeeper gifted his Tui Bee Balm recipe to the community. In early years some members worked as volunteers to help establish the business. It now employs around ten Tui residents full or part time and contributes five percent of an annual turnover in excess of \$600,000 to charities chosen by its employees. A number of these are Tui charities.

Tui has attracted many new members, but some have come and gone and the number of trustees has stabilised at twenty-five to thirty-five. Trustees living away from the community may rent their houses out to other trustees or non-member residents. Including children, and adults who are not trustees, Tui's current population is closer to fifty. Tui is culturally heterogeneous; of roughly thirty current members, eight are New Zealanders and twenty-two were born elsewhere, mostly in North America or Western Europe.

For many years meals were shared each day in the community house, and adult Tui residents were all expected to maintain a large communal garden. However, many of the trustees now prefer to eat at home and garden for themselves. In an attempt to cater for such changes, separate structures had evolved by 2004. Those trustees who preferred to live communally, along with other residents and visitors, were called the 'family community'. But half the trustees opted for 'extended community', which meant they could live more independently, and while continuing to attend trust meetings, could avoid community meetings.

The extended community phase is now over and there is one community again. Achieving that has meant important changes such as scaling back the Tui garden and employing a fulltime grounds-man. Today the most important goal is to attract young families; the average age of members has been climbing steadily but several grown-up children have come back to live, and Tui has young children once again.



Tui

Bibliography

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