

Harp Retreat, Port Waikato School Camp, 24-26 March

Harps, friendship, fun and laughter and plenty of nice food and Oh did I mention harps?

We made our way down the exceedingly busy Southern Motorway on a grey Friday afternoon: destination Port Waikato School Camp. Our journey was extended unavoidably as a truck and trailer unit had overturned and had slid down the bank along the main road to Port Waikato past Pokeno. We were turned away by the police and had to find another way. The GPS wanted us to go around in circles so ignoring that we made our way to Mercer and eventually got to the camp. We found a series of buildings built in the first half of the twentieth century (and used as a health camp for many years) including plenty of large dormitories, small rooms for couples, a great dining hall and a fabulous commercial kitchen.



The rain came and stayed for Friday evening and all day Saturday, however it didn't stop us in any way. Harps were unloaded and moved around as necessary – we used the dining hall and two of the large dorms for our music sessions. We had new music, old music and some very old music (Turlough O'Carolan's tunes are hundreds of years old!) and the joy of playing together as a group. The Auckland Harp Orchestra joined with the Begenz group on Friday evening and on Saturday and Sunday the groups split with Anna Dunwoodie taking the intermediate and advanced harpists and guest tutor Elizabeth Bennett took the Begenz and beginner players. An interesting aspect of this year's Harp Retreat was the encouragement we were all given to arrange pieces and to create base lines for the music we were given.

Harp Retreat wasn't just about the harps – this year we had members of the Auckland Scottish Fiddle Society along to play with us. Fiddles and harps sound great together and after an afternoon session playing through a group of tunes, the fiddlers continued on playing for the ceilidh after dinner. Harps were put

aside and wild dancing and laughter took place. It was great to see the kids in their jammies and onesies dancing with the adults.

Harp Retreat is also about friendship – catching up with those you haven't seen for a while, making new friends, helping each other out – here I must give a huge thanks to those who worked in the kitchen and provided us with delicious and plentiful food.

The Port Waikato School, Camp met our needs with decent space and a very nice drive to get there. The beds were comfy too. I very much look forward to the next Retreat.

Raewynn Robertson



This year was my second Harp Retreat. It was a bit soggier than last time, but just as much fun...!

The dynamic of lots of different musicians together is always interesting, you never know who you're going to learn something from. As is often the case with events like this, there were people I'd met before and people I hadn't, people older than me and those much younger, people I had more experience than and those with vast amounts more. I found that meeting each person was enriching for different reasons, including those who were there as 'support crew' rather than musicians; and including those who played a different instrument... we had fiddle players, a cello player, flautists, as well as us harpers!

The usual convention at this point is to say what the highlight of the weekend was for me, but I keep changing my mind. I had some really great chats with new and existing friends. I saw a young student go from knowing very few people and out of her comfort zone harp-wise, to being in the thick of a thriving social circle as well as putting some solid effort into musical challenges and reaping

the rewards. I had a fantastic time dancing at the ceilidh! I heard some delicious music played by others, and I learned some fun new tunes myself. I really enjoyed the sessions where we learned tunes without the sheet music, although I still found them jolly difficult. Like so many things, it does get a little easier each time, but it still takes me lots and lots of repetition to retain anything. It really is worth it, even if your brain ends up leaking out your ears! The lovely thing is that tunes I learn that way seem to come back to me much more easily than tunes learned from the page, which can be very satisfying. I think the trick to those sessions is ignoring that disheartening feeling that you're the only one who isn't keeping up, because that invariably is *not* the case... and if you need something repeated or slowed down, don't be afraid to ask, because there *will* be others in the room who are grateful to go over it again too!

Ok yes it rained a bit, but that didn't slow us down! I had a total blast, looking forward to the next one already

Wendy Piddington



The Pinehurst gals Coco, Seina, Kitty. ⇒

It was so lovely to recognise more faces this time, to know a few more people, and to be a part of this growing harp family. Highlights for me included playing together, and getting more learning new tunes without sheet And when my brain was full, quietly playing music to the trees in the outdoor chapel was a lovely way to unwind. Like last time, I came away feeling inspired to practice more and to work towards new harp goals.



pieces all
experience at
music (fun and challenging!)

Nadia Benton

And this one from *Lynx*

This was my second harp retreat, and I enjoyed it every bit as much as the first one - despite the heavy rain, everything was managed calmly and efficiently. I am a (late) adult learner, and I have been harping on and off for over six years now. It was such a treat to focus solely on harping over the entire weekend from Friday night to Sunday afternoon, in such glorious surroundings. I loved the times when we all came together; beginners, intermediates and proficient harpists all making beautiful music in a large ensemble; and I totally loved the fun we had at the Saturday night Ceilidh. As a member of the 'BegEnz' group, I found Elizabeth Bennet's teaching very valuable; she stretched us, but not too much, and I came away from the weekend totally re-inspired. So much so, in fact, that before the end of the weekend I had negotiated with my work so that I can now have regular lessons and join with the 'Morning Gals' on a Monday.

I also reconnected with people whom I had met at the Whatipu retreat two years ago, as well as making new friends. If you haven't yet been to a Harp Retreat, watch out for the next one, and join us. You won't regret it!



The Dio harpers ⇒
Mandip, Abby, Jiajia,
Emily and Cloris.