

I love it when you talk back

This is almost Covid-free, because I want to write instead about some of the reactions I get to this column.

Recent feedback has included readers' accounts of battling new technology, trying to get overseas travel refunds, views on the proposed Māori ward at NPDC, and a lot of suggestions about how to reform our local government structures.

Let me tell you first about a rare book that arrived in the mail (with a return envelope), sender Bryan Hamerton motivated by the June 13 column speculating on where the country's first rugby matches were staged.

The book - a 1976 publication celebrating Patea Rugby Football Club's first 100 years - goes some way towards answering my question about whether Patea was ahead of Whanganui, which is now recognised as the first (1869).

They may have begun around the same time, the mid-to-late 1860s, given Whanganui and Taranaki were widely settled by militia after the Land Wars, some of them former British Army soldiers, who were already exposed to the development of rugby back home in Britain.

Many stayed on after the NZ government decided about 1864 to dispense with the costly British Empire regiments and form home-grown units that would eventually include the Armed Constabulary.

Formed at a meeting in the Albion Hotel in Carlyle (renamed Patea in 1881) in 1876, the Patea club owes its origins to members of the Armed Constabulary, who were the district's first rugby exponents, says Bryan's book.

New Zealand's first inter-provincial match appears to be one played in 1873, when the armed forces in Patea and Hawera played a 16-a-side match against Wanganui Club at Whanganui.

Two other clubs were founded later in 1876, says the book's introduction, one at Tikorangi and another called Hawera-Waihi. The former, set up on what is now the Faull dairy farm, later joined Waitara to form Clifton, while the latter split into Hawera and Waimate.

On the matter of the Māori ward touted for New Plymouth District Council, I got dozens of messages and emails, almost all of them in favour of the idea. I appreciate such positive feedback but wonder still about the silent majority.

My May 16 cogitations on whether Taranaki needs fewer local councils drew some thoughtful ideas from a range of people. One from an Inglewood resident thought smaller communities are missing out within NPDC and he'd like to see his town merge with Stratford.

An intriguing plan came in from former NP councillor Russell Gilmer, who'd like to see a single Taranaki Provincial Council with community boards for New Plymouth, Hawera and Stratford, each with wards, and a subsidiary body called Environment Taranaki to take over Taranaki Regional Council's relevant functions.

One reader sympathised with me about getting travel refunds, although he swore by booking agency Booking.com, whereas in my experience AirBnB were much better.

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They finally assigned our case to Millat O. of France, who made good on her promise to try to get Mark of Edinburgh to give us back \$355 of our \$485 deposit.

I'm not sure how much choice Mark had in the end and I don't much care. Overall, our recovery rate has hit 91 percent.

My Apple "hell" narrative last week drew lengthy emails of recognition from readers Terry Stowers, Anne Calcott and Ken Martin.

Terry says he has been an avid Apple user since 1986 and is well used to its security and phone help system. "I've also lost some hair when I have fallen foul of access systems, so could recognise the challenges you faced."

He recommends calling 0800-127-753, which he understands connects to the NZ Apple help centre if it is running, or if not to a robot that routes your call to the appropriate help desk, a system that works well in his experience.

Anne recounted her brushes with Vodafone - whose bill became a nightmare to pay - and Trustpower, whose chat system worked well. "Vodafone: fail. Trustpower: pass. Total amount of time spent either online or thinking about it - best part of a day."

Ken says his challenge is working out how to migrate more than 1000 songs from iTunes on an old Mac. "Still, as I approach 80, it is worthwhile keeping my brain active. It may even defer mild cognitive decline. I hope!"

Final thanks go to Robert Taylor, who accuses me of favouring the left, and Bronwen Hedley, who says I lean right. Ah, sweet nirvana.