

**Interviewee:** Ross Jackson  
**Title:** GWRC Landscape Architect  
**Interview Date:** 02/12/24.  
**Interview Time:** 4:00 - 4:50 PM

## Audio file

Ross Jackson (1).m4a

## Transcript

00:01:11 Lexi

Our first question was, could you introduce yourself for someone who doesn't know who you are?

00:01:20 Ross

I'm Ross Jackson and I'm a part time employee these days, GWRC. I'm a landscape architect. I am 79 years old. I've been with this Council since 1988. Originally more in parks and open spaces. For the last decade I've been working with flood protection since I retired and sort of carried on and it sort of got less and less more part time.

00:02:05 Ross

During that time, I've worked a lot with environmental and restoration groups throughout the region. For the last period, having heavily involved the ones associated with the river. I'm actually just as a side going. That's the friends of Waiwhetu stream. That's a little stream that feeds into the Hutt River it comes in down by the mouth and it's been badly neglected over the years. There's a wonderful community group here, the friends waiwhetu.

00:02:47 Ross

I go to the meetings on Thursday night. Their monthly meetings and we're just in the process of organizing a walk over with the councils and various people involved, we say a walk over, we do it by bus. It's just for practical reasons. You can't get them to see enough of it.

00:03:11 Ross

But it's it's one of those little streams right in the middle of the valley is very, very vulnerable to flooding, and it's flooded badly. And it's sort of been built up to in the

previous groups, some of them have done quite a lot of work around that of sea level rise and how it impacts on that area.

00:03:32 Ross

Another one on the warning systems.

00:03:38 Aileen

Can you kind of tell us how you first got involved with your work along the river corridor?

00:03:43 Ross

Yeah, sure. I'm a runner for a long time and we lived in up Upper Hutt and I commuted into town and I travelled by carpool all the time. But part of the time, I'd run portions or the whole thing and so it was an intimate part of our training. It was an easy way and sort of started like that. That's many years ago and in 1990 or 91, Rotary came to the Regional Council looking for a project to celebrate 50 years of Rotary in the Hunt Valley and they were looking for something to do in the planting line and I said yes, so why don't we do a trail?

00:04:33 Ross

That resonated with them and so we focused, then when they went ahead with it on the Eastern side, the true Left Bank just putting gravel strips connecting where the service tracks already existing. And just so people could get along and so that really helps out in a more formal way. There's no real budget and they used to, Rotary could facilitate quite a lot there. Rotary as an organization, it seems to have just more older people now you know, although where you're going next week, you might see a bit a bit different. But, they facilitated a lot of, you know, great work that we couldn't do. They could apply for grants and things. And because as a Council, we couldn't and they're wonderful partners and they're just two or three key people we worked with constantly. One of them, sadly died. Robin Ward.

00:05:39 Ross

And um Linton Adams was Robin's, sort of offsider, if you like. You know? So he's he's carried on. But you know, with with the two cities, Upper Hutt and and Lower Hut, they've sort of got very involved because they needed to the rivers such a strong focal point in the whole landscape in both those cities, you know, and their open space strategies sort of promote the river.

00:06:21 Ross

In the case of lower hut, a lot of well and upper Hutt to a degree, a lot of students get to college and that sort of thing. They can go along the river corridor so they've ended up selling and making improvements in some of those areas and for their own interest and yeah, but the whole thing's grown a bit like topsy. But I think one of the key things we did in the mid-90s was make up of informal Hut River Trail committee and that was made of representatives from those different organizations and within the council with parks which I was in and meddling around a flood protections area and that was often a wee bit we fraught because flood protection didn't know what was happening on their patch, so to speak.

00:07:20 Ross

I think we're, we've come a long way since then. Like you say, matured and you know there's a much better harming in and once we got a River Ranger appointed. That made a big difference, and when you have someone. Like Joby, you know, he's got very good skills inter personal skills, which you need because you're at the interface with the public and with different parts of the organization. Yeah, so that's how some involvement became and I've just continued to be involved from setting up a committee and ongoing things.

(cut out some transcript here)

00:08:33 Ross

It's sort of different people in different periods of time, but at the time they wanted to call the Rotary River walk. I managed to convince them overtime that trail was a more generic name that was a relatively new, here is a very American name, but it somehow implied multi use as opposed to. If you say a rotary river walk, it sounds like it's just for walking. 1991 mountain bikes were more in their infancy there and they were coming and they didn't often have. We don't have any bikes and so it's I've had those beginnings.

(cut out some transcript here)

00:09:59 Ross

Suspected there's going to be a few challenges in trying to do that planting and the trail seemed to be something there for. You know, there's a real need and it's really hit the spot with them. And they get very involved. I think there were seven clubs in the Hunt Valley at that stage and Linton may have spoken about that and each club they drew up maps, each club was responsible for different sectors and you know, they were, they were really good doing a lot of things but hard to keep that momentum going. Rotary tends to be often just a one project sort of thing during that term. Of the chairman or whoever. So this was a bit more diverse than that, and then they went ahead and developed these sorts of things. You

know that that was, you know, through the efforts of them, one of them, that an architect and one of the clubs and he did that and it was a great.

00:11:08 Ross

Great effort then, hmm. And then develop signage. And we try and work with them. But they could. That one of their members had a big engineering firm.

00:11:22 Ross

And Petone we'll see you and they sort of manufactured signs, you know, and put in the early ones that you have seen some just a single pole around hoop. Yeah. With that on? Yeah. And I mean, those are 30 years old. Yeah. They need to be a bit out of date, but yeah.

00:11:48 Frankie

Can you tell us a little bit about how it's evolved; the space has evolved since you first started working on it.

00:11:57 Ross

Well, it's, it's evolved, I guess from just a gravel strip to in many cases, you know, wide tar sealed asphalt, you know, black top, trying to think of the right term for you and more and more. We have, we have them on both acts this way and both sides of the river and. Trying to make that the if your lunchtime want to go out for walking that city you could cross one bridge, you know. Coming couple of kilometers back across another, it's much more satisfying. Rather than just going up and back, trying to get those loops between bridges and so, it's involved and in that sort of way and the demand that people enjoy it. They want to see a bit more.

00:12:51 Speaker 3

Could you have predicted the direction it's gone in now back then?

00:12:55 Ross

No, no, no, especially not the diversity of use, no. No, you know, mobility scooters, scooters, electric bikes, all of those sort of things. We thought there be some bikes, but yeah, yeah, no, nothing like that.

00:13:26 Lexi

And what about what is your current role in any of the projects involving the Hot River corridor? If you have any?

00:13:36 Ross

I guess I have an overview sort of thing with Council and on specific projects, so to get more involved and I'm trying to organize a detailed brief to get the history of it written. I think there's a lot of good stories along there and I think as I mentioned this morning. That trail is as much its much wider than the than we keep talking of the River Trail when we're talking about swimming or planting or you know, it's it's the river corridor in many ways. So it's almost a bit of a metaphor for something different, you know. Yeah. And I would like to get that. Some writing off the ground, but because it was fairly informal. A lot of the early work and we managed to get different reports done by.

00:14:45 Ross

You know, a couple of graduate landscape architects who are on a government employment scheme to design sections or, you know, initial work, that sort of. And there's a lot of information like that that I've got a lot in the box at home. They're in the archives here. Linton would have the same, as one or two others. And so we're trying to get a. Something where we can get a masters student from Victoria University to perhaps? Go through all that stuff through a literature search and pull together. And toss out the boxes of things that you know, get one of everything and start pulling all that information and the and the basis of a story together. But it needs to be something that's fairly pictorial and easy to read and to flick through.

00:15:40 Ross

So I have the thoughts and I finished in June and that's gonna be a wee bit of focus of mine to keep that ball ticking over.

00:15:53

And when you say sorry when you say you're finished and you in June, what do you mean?

00:15:59 Ross

My contract, you know, I was supposed to finish years ago and it kept getting, kept going, kept going, you know, because we haven't got him doing this at the moment. So it was extended till June this year, so. But actually I'm sort of quite keen to try and stay involved with, in some way, WPI. So, I'll endeavor to sort of hear facilitator there if I can so.

00:16:36 Aileen

I was just gonna ask kind of what your involvement was with the River Link project and how that kind of started up?

00:16:45 Ross

When I started, after I've retired from parks and finished so to speak, I had a few things. On the go, but Riverlink. That was just sounding, and flood protection was doing that and I was asked to work for initially 6 months where we were wanting to engage with all the various Community groups. A lot of the people you know are former runners.

00:17:15 Ross

For those to talk to them about River Link and which was the most favored option, there's several ways they had several suggestions to widen in two bites or should they go to the City side, or should they go to the other side? And so that was those preliminary stages. We had hearings. And that was very satisfying. Working through all of that. And then it's carried on until it's finally at the stage where we have this huge conglomerate. That's gonna start work on it all. Yeah. So I, I've been right out of that for the last 18 months, I suppose, but prior to that I had some involvement. Yes, I'm very familiar with it, but not the day-to-day details anymore.

00:18:13 Bettina

Can you describe any challenges you have had to overcome with the development of the Hutt River Corridor?

00:18:20 Ross

It was always little hiccups. Linton, his offsider Robin Ward was a wonderful facilitator of. He had a his own little engineering business of selling engineering componentry, and when he sold that he sort of devoted himself. But he had these good, good skills. And it was a great lesson to all of us, but because of who he was, he seemed to be able to cross boundaries, very much part of our whole restructuring here nowadays is to trying it away from silos so that different departments.

00:19:06 Ross

Do work more that way, and while it's a bit clumsy at the moment, I think philosophically it's the right way to go and we had too much of that in the past. This is ours, we're looking after the manager of flood protection back in those days, sort of like we can come on here with that trail, but don't involve us and you know, it was sort of you're treading wearily. Until now we have an asset that everyone loves and everybody uses it and councilors love it. And so it's snowballed. As a result, you know of that.

00:19:45 Ross

So that's sort of been very satisfying, but it's been a long, slow thing. You're working with lots of different groups of people and trying to set it just like this as you're finding out, you

know, trying to listen to everyone and accept their requirements or listen to them and work your way through the hiccups.

00:20:15 Ross

When you spoke to Beth, what had meant before her time, but just so the incident where one of the funny tales has happened over time on the true Left Bank from Stokes Valley through the tighter gorge, it's quite narrow. The track goes down below. The road it's nice because if you're walking along the hill, you can ride through. If you're quite removed from everything else. The golf courses across the other side. And when we originally got that section of track put through, we had a government employment scheme where one of the governments at some stage trying to help the unemployed by giving them schemes, they had to make. We had to make this track and it was all a bit hand to mouth and you know, wouldn't meet today's health and safety requirements, but it's gradually to get upgraded until it's there and it's well used.

00:21:19 Ross

But one of these early little bridges they built along. And these were people who went. Carpenters doesn't necessarily or you know that just unemployed, who had done a few odd jobs and but that they enjoyed doing this. But they've built some little bridges to get through over a couple of low spots and one day there was a whole one of these had been cut off. One of these little bridges, and it had been pushed down the bank and we were sort of what the hell has happened here? No one could figure out and called the police and asked. It was quite an essential structure. Who did it? And there's no real explanation. It's a good example of how rumors can develop. We had a carpenter in our Parks Department he used to.

00:22:19 Ross

I don't know. He was a bit of a dramatist somehow.

00:22:37 Ross

You know, and his imagination ran wild with them at times. And someone had said that there's a group of guys that went down there and one of them had a backpack on and he has brown skin. And they reckon something was sticking out of it. It could have been a sore and this story. It got all out of kilter anyway, there's nothing could be found about that. He he was sort of pronouncing what his theory was. The local news wrote an article about it all and showed it all and then a slightly red faced parent came forward and said Ohh our kids were riding their horses along there, two of them, and one of them got down between the bank, the horse and the structure and they got in a real panic. They couldn't get the horse

out. And so they called the parent and they brought in their own chainsaw, cut the structure off and pushed it down the bank to get it away you know, no one ever thought of that?

00:23:55 Ross

But the stories that have had sort of had developed within our organization of what it was, you know, someone so racially and you know, and oh geez, went on. It was terrible.

00:24:14 Speaker 3

Can you tell us some like the most impactful who had who or what has been the most impactful to the trail? Maybe even an organization?

00:24:28 Aileen

Specifically, like the evolution like how it's evolved overtime like what's been the most impactful in helping that happen.

00:24:40 Ross

I think gradually we've got more and more support within the organization and in all organizations. Both Upper Hut and Lower Hutt Council and this one, it's just been a collective effort. There's been certain milestones. I mean, A) getting started. That was one, but then at the time when we appointed a Ranger, there was another key milestone on just lifting up a whole notch.

00:25:15 Ross

Yeah. And there's just been more and more support. Graham Campbell, you interviewed, you know, Graham's been very supportive of all our stuff. And he was the park, he was the floodplain management for 15 odd years or so? Yeah, I don't think there's one thing, just collective. And there's a desire. And everyone likes it. Overall, as you would have found out, you know, it's a nice place to be and keep promoting.

(cut out transcript here)

00:26:22 Aileen

I was just gonna say, do you think it's been hard at all to manage the recreational and the flood protection at all?

00:26:31 Ross

I don't think it's caused too much of an issue, but if the trail's too close to the river, it gets washed out and then the public demand, why isn't it fixed? I've got people calling me all the

time who know me, saying you know, it's not like it should be and you try and that they have a perception that it should be you know pristine. That they can walk in their high heels or ride their bikes along and there's been no promise of that ever so. Yeah, some sometimes it's in a floodplain, you know, it's it's gonna have challenges and and there's so many other competing uses along there, they really have to take your place.

00:27:21 Speaker 3

Have you been faced with a problem like this in the past? Sort of like fighting between two people. Kind of like on the trail and stuff?

00:27:28 Ross

You get that constantly and. Yeah, but it's usually a positive thing when you're doing something in recreation or parks. There's a there's a will to keep improving. I mean, I've worked the parks for 25 years and you know it's it was a sort of a front door place to the organization because of what it's producing. You asked the poor people who work in consents you know have to say that "you know, you're not doing this right in your river or something". And there's water leak but they're the enemies all the time. So it's a nice area of work. And there's always wee challenges, but you've got to work around them, and they are not insurmountable.

00:28:32 Aileen

What is your opinion on the addition of a commuter to the Hutt River corridor.

00:28:43 Ross

If there were some limited sections, it may be possible to do that as long as there's good alternatives for other people. As I say from the Melling Bridge South on the Left Bank, where the shop banks wide, we've got a big wide sealed one on top and you've got a gravel one down there, that sort of thing is the beginning. You know, you could do that for limited sections, but I wouldn't like to see it exclusively. No, I think there's too many narrow points and it's just to involve them and gosh. I like the whole philosophy of an environmental corridor. You know, an ecological corridor that incorporates these activities. So, I see all of those things as really important. And try to get more things growing in the practical way and.

00:30:04 Bettina

What directions would you like to see the trail, or the corridor, evolve to in the future?

00:30:12 Ross

I think there's a greater desire for having sealed areas sealed, you know black top and so I think that we probably do need to do more areas than that. I wouldn't like to see it all exclusively. It would need to be in conjunction with some you know metal gravel sections.

00:30:46 Ross

I'd like it to still be a fairly informal. Sort of feeling like you're getting away from the total built environment?

(cut some transcript out)

00:31:19 Ross

That's where I see that more of an ecological corridor that connects. The river I see is is very important. We have a lot of. Brick parks or high areas that are not necessary, and that was one of my motivations. Originally the River trail. There weren't necessarily linked to anywhere they were there. But the rivers are the place where you can you can get things growing. And people can move along so you can actually combine those sort of two aspects. Your conservation and your recreation if you like along the river corridor, but bearing in mind there's a whole built population there. If there's a need for certain flood protection measures, well then you have to try and compromise and fit your way into that. And that's you know, it's one of the most populated valleys in the in the country and if we had a major flood geez and I shudder to think, yeah.

00:32:28 Frankie

And what has working along the corridor meant to you?

00:32:36 Ross

I felt working. I mean I thoroughly enjoyed it. You know, just seeing it all develop. I've taken a bit of pleasure out of the bits that I've been involved in. The bush, and if you're around long enough, you have a bit of an influence. And sometimes, just like in your own work and studies you, you think you're not making any progress and you've got to sit down at the end of the year and write down the things that you've done. And oh yeah, we have achieved away, but I think it's just being part of that whole collective over a long period of time.

00:33:20 Lexi

Then can you describe some of the best memories involved with that?

00:33:45 Ross

I think that really at least there's a whole lot of collector ones. There's no, I don't think there's any major one. Yeah, you get a great bit of pleasure with this. Some new bit of

planting or some new section goes down, you know. Did you go through Manor Park, the golf course? You know, I mean, that was sort of a struggle for years to get that through and it is what it is, you know, and it's. Sort of getting there was quite a major achievement because see that used to be a private golf course and we, we're trying to get through there and there's no way in hell they wanted anything to do with us until they got into financial strife. And there's lots of options for them.

00:34:36 Ross

And we ended up buying that golf course. So, I was quite involved in the and helped them to coordinate the analysis of it all with a river engineer for Graham Campbell, was the big motivator there.

00:34:51 Ross

We own Shandon Golf course right down at the bottom, and it's because they have these open spaces. And even though it might be zoned for development sure as hell, there'd be pressure going on the local council to allow some development. And so we have exactly what we have in the RiverLink project where this all these things have been built too close and now we're having to spend hundreds of millions of dollars moving them away to get through and say when the opportunity came to buy Manor Park and then lease it back to them. This worked out very well. They've been very happy about that because it's cleared their debt and gave them some capital to work with. And release it back from the condition that cycle trail went in. And so that took a wee bit of a challenge, but it's there now, so to speak and through its ups and downs, yeah.

00:35:49 Aileen

Do you think you could kind of describe in your own words why this work with the corridor is important and specifically why it's important to the Community that lives there?

00:36:00 Ross

Umm I just think it's a key landscape. Everyone enjoys going to it. It's a key landscape and you know it's a great way to help them and sort of. In developing an ecological corridor that is sucking out some carbon and seeing the use of cycling and that sort of thing. Rather than vehicles, well, it's a positive thing.

00:36:41 Ross

The rivers, unfortunately over the years, have always attracted poor behavior. Or, you know, they used to be the places we pumped all our rubbish into rivers. You know, the world over and it still gets that that sort of thing where anything goes in the river, you know,

the dumping and you know. What we classify as a social behavior. But it all happens down there and which is pretty disappointing. But it's a certain element who wants to lead off some steam, and so that's a convenient place to go.

00:37:31 Bettina

In an ideal scenario for you, what would the future of this trail be?

00:37:45 Ross

I'd like to see it continue as a multi-use trail. You know for, for all and certainly not exclusive use for, for anyone, but I'm talking about non motorized, even though we have electrics, it's part of the environmental strategy for things that have developed over the years is to try and get parking nodes you've driven to there and you can walk or ride or from that node. Those continuous tracks that just, you know we haven't got so many of them now. People drive along just to get away from all of that. It's just bad behaviour and it makes it very miserable for the people there.

00:38:31 Ross

So I'm you know, a real proponent of the stuff that we have in that environmental strategy, just quietly keeping developing that. As and when, you know, finances and things allowed. You know, we're always excited about the use when you get the national cycleway, all these different things adopted for their own ends and that's great. It's going to be pretty challenging. I think when the links from the city open up and you'll get more and more roaring up and down, that'll be exciting in some ways to see some. Just gotta make a provision for other people or other users. And I think the horses are the difficult ones to really do it other than in some selected areas and that's not very satisfying for them.

00:39:35 Aileen

How do you see our project kind of playing a role into this development that we're working on right now.

00:39:43 Ross

For a great for starters you are doing this whole awareness thing, you know you're creating, you're asking these questions that I have to think about. You know, you've asked lots of people, those sorts of things, and that's really important and yeah. I just think lifting the whole profile of that and the importance of that because a lot of people feel quite precious about it and it's difficult to being all things to all people, but you know, some would want to have playground structures all over the place and things like that, which is nice. But, you know, flood protection doesn't want that.

(cutt from transcript)

00:46:00 Aileen

You guys. Oh, I was just going to ask Ross. Now that your contract is like running up in June, what do you think spend like your favorite part about working for Greater Wellington?

00:46:14 Ross

Gosh, my favorite. But I've had lots of. I've been very fortunate. It's lots of great people. Lot of community groups. You know, and you have to spend time with each other developing relationships and overtime.

00:46:33 Ross

You know, develop really strong relationships and I think that's so important.

00:46:40 Ross

Get a lot of pleasure out of.

00:46:42 Ross

I get calls all the time asked my view about things, even the though I'm remote from it now and so that's really nice.

00:46:55 Ross

Just all those intimate things should build up. I mean, there's a landscape architect. I'm a life member of our institute. Now it's sort of been very satisfying, but just. A lot has come from just working with people on the land. I was never. Was kid on it? You know, we started off on drawing boards and that's the thing. So I never got into the computer technology. I was sort of, you know, there's people like you coming on, doing all of that sort of thing, but it's sort of. You found you could follow your more of your. Their strengths and interests and pursued. You know the overarching things and and trying to to link together.

00:48:02 Ross

Cool, yeah.

00:48:03 Bettina

Sounds like you've enjoyed it.

00:48:04 Ross

Yeah, that's been great. Ohh yeah, it's.

00:48:08 Ross

I've been very fortunate, yeah.

00:48:12 Ross

Sometimes you can have to be careful and step back a bit, become very precious about something.

00:48:17 Ross

You know.

00:48:20 Ross

You know it's it's not how I had in mind. Well, I'm not the only one, you know. So I think you'd have to accept that that you can get.

00:48:30 Ross

75/80% of the.

00:48:32 Ross

Of where you're heading? That's that's a, you know, a good compromise, yeah.