



Rod Eatwell

This article appeared in the Stuff Newspaper on 30 November, shortly after Rod's death. The article was written by Alice Angeloni at The Marlborough Express.

The original article appeared here:

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/108985932/rod-eatwell-the-queen-charlotte-track-grandfather-has-died-age-90>

Rod Eatwell loved chatting to people. Even at the age of 90, he spent most of his time moseying up and down the Queen Charlotte Track with his walking stick.

Rod dedicated three decades to the Marlborough Sounds track, but died in a car crash on Wednesday.

The track was one of three contenders for New Zealand's new Great Walk, and judges were walking the track when Rod died. Rod is considered to be the grandfather of the Kenepuru Walkway that later became part of the Queen Charlotte Track, the Department of Conservation website said. Rod Eatwell finished building a toilet on the track one month before he died.

His son John Eatwell said his Dad could often be seen riding an old lawnmower maintaining the track for free. Just last month, and with a broken hip, Rod finally finished building a toilet block on the track, something he was determined to do. "He was certainly fully engaged in life. He took life by the horns," John said. Rod loved to yarn with people as they passed through his property, walkers more so than mountainbikers.

He was a unique and sometimes fiery character, whose service for the community was driven by a genuine love of people. As one of the largest private landowners on the Queen Charlotte Track, he was credited for making the popular walking and biking track a reality. He was always clearing viewing points for track users, putting benches and signs up on the track, John said.

"He was certainly very passionate about people and getting people out there walking and enjoying New Zealand's beauty."

Rod Eatwell put up signs and placed picnic tables along his part of the track, where he also cleans the DOC long drop toilet.

John said his father's love of people took on different forms throughout his life. "He had the motels in Renwick for 25 years, from 1968 to 1985. He had a deep respect for the elderly, and ran the annual "old people's day" where people would come to the motel and have scones and relax on the lawn, he said. He was also involved with young people, running scouts and youth groups and talent quests. "He's also a bit of a character, he enjoyed a bit of fun, was always up for a laugh and a bit of a joke. Passionate for people would be the key theme."

He was a person who got out and did things. "He was always busy, always active. He's 90 and had trouble getting around, but he still wanted to do things. He was passionate about democracy and ensuring people's voices were heard, John said. "He was certainly a long time writer to the Marlborough Express in terms of letters to the newspaper advocating for people's rights. "He lobbied hard when he didn't think people were being involved or heard."

Rod Eatwell was seen motoring up to the track on a quad bike, and in later years on a ride-on lawn mower. Queen Charlotte Track chairman Rob Burn said on Thursday he extended his condolences to the family on behalf of DOC and the Queen Charlotte Track inc. "It's a big loss," Burn said. "He's had a few lives." He could have died on the day when he drove his land rover 10 metres over a bank, crawled out, had a heart attack, cleaned the toilets, and then walked home and told his wife to call the ambulance, Burn said. Or the time when he and his mates were at the Portage Resort Hotel, the railing gave way and they fell a few metres to the pavement below. He had also had a few close calls on the quad bike, Burn said.

"He's been the land owner arguably with the greatest vision of the track. "When funding failed, he kept on with it and took some of the other land owners along with him. "It was a privilege to go there in the last few years and have a cup of tea and sit on his porch with him and just talk about how he helped build the track and how he loved the land out there."

"Don't miss Eatwell lookout" reads a sign painted up by Rod.

Lynda Scott-Kelly, a fellow private land owner along the track and former Kaikōura MP, said she had known Rod nearly all her life. "He was very keen on the walkers, not so keen on the bikers," she said. The track meant a huge amount to him, she said. "He typified how we all feel so passionately about the land, the care of that land and the care of it for the future. "We hope that will continue with the new generation. He was a real character, a real individual, she said. He set up signs to a "Eatwell's lookout" and encouraged people to go off the track to see the incredible view, she said. "Most people are amazed the way the Queen Charlotte track works as a partnership and then they get to meet Rod, it adds such a dimension."

Rod was honoured at a parliamentary awards ceremony in 2017 for his work on the track.

Gary Benner was writing a family history of the Eatwell family in New Zealand from their arrival in New Zealand around 1875. "It is a sad and ironic twist that his grandmother Jessie Eatwell, suffered a similar fate, but under even more tragic circumstances. "She has just delivered her son to the ship that would take him into service in WWI as part of the Expeditionary Force, when her horse and buggy collided with another vehicle.

Rod Eatwell was the husband of the late Kath and Glen; father and father-in-law of Mary and Stephen Butler, Phoebe Giles, Ruth Parsons, and John and Gabrielle Eatwell; grandad and great-grandad of Danny, Jo, Kelvin, Stephen, Rachel, Keith, Kathleen, Connor, Pania, Fergus, Shaila, Cayden, Henry, Sebastian, and Corban.