



West Auckland Men's Rebus Club Newsletter

November 2024

Next meeting: 10:00 am Friday 8th November, Friendship Hall, 3063 Great North Rd, New Lynn

COMMITTEE

President	Bill Mutch	president@rebuswestauckland.nz	817 4721
Vice-President	Noel Rose	noelrose1976@gmail.com	828 1305
Immediate Past President	Bill Fairs	bill.fairs@gmail.com	627 8297
Secretary	Vince Middeldorp	secretary@rebuswestauckland.nz	828 5250
Treasurer	Charles Nicholls	treasurer@rebuswestauckland.nz	6293816
Outings	Ian Smith	ismith435@gmail.com	027 4549343
Newsletter	Vince Middeldorp	editor@rebuswestauckland.nz	828 5250
Speakers	Noel Rose	noelrose1976@gmail.com	828 1305
Hospitality	Trevor Pollard		817 8822
Attendance	Stephen David	sj david55@gmail.com	021641717
Welfare Officer	Bill Mutch	celebrantwedding@gmail.com	021316556
Photographer	John Mihaljevic	john@rebuswestauckland.nz	098361504



Treasurer Charles Nicholls JP (standing) chats with trips organiser Ian Smith at the October meeting

MEETING REPORT

October 2024

Chairman: Bill Mutch

Attendance: 23 members and 1 visitor

Members: Raymond Barrett, Bobby Bland, Neil Castle, John Corban, Stephen David, Vince Dennehy, Bill Fairs, Maurice Forbes, Robert King, John McKeown, Vince Middeldorp, John Mihaljevic, Bill Mutch, Andrew Narayan, Charles Nicholls, Trevor Pollard, Paul Robertson, Noel Rose, Ian Smith, Alan Verry, Ken Webster, Allan Williamson, Garrick Yearsley. Visitor: John (surname not known).

1. Apologies:

Apologies were received from Lyndsay Parris, Mensto De Roos, Alan Babich.



Neil Castle age 95, having a discussion with Trevor Pollard's little Scottish friend Bobby Bland

2. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting (September):

- No matters were noted or discussed further.

3. Correspondence:

- Rebus Club News.

4. Treasurer's Report:

- Financial summary: Club has a projected end-of-year profit of over \$300.
- Discussion on income sources: noted grants, reimbursements, and deposits for future events.

5. Upcoming Events & Outings:

- **Morning Coffee:** Scheduled for October 23 at the Alderman, Henderson.
- **Bus Trip to Puhoi Pub:** November 6, \$20 for the bus, \$10 entry fee to Cauldron House. Payment details and times to be confirmed via email.
- **Christmas Lunch:** December 6 at McHugh's, Cheltenham Beach. Bus departs at 9:15 am from St John's Hall.

6. Welfare Report:

- Report on Andrew's (Andrew Geddes) health, noting he can now sip water unassisted.

7. Upcoming Speaker:

- November Speaker: Wendy Hampton on estate planning. Encouragement for members to attend and bring anyone interested in this topic.

8. Member Updates and Reflections:

- Charles Nichols shared reflections on his recent travels through Europe, emphasizing positive experiences with transportation, kindness from strangers, and the reliability of modern technology. He also encouraged members to pursue personal goals.

Claudia's Corner

Why do milking stools only have three legs?
Because the cow has the udder!

Why did the banana go to the Doctor?
Because he was not peeling well.

Patient: Doctor I keep forgetting everything.
Doctor: How long has this been going on?
Patient: How long has what been going on?

Patient: Doctor I feel like a snooker ball.
Doctor: Get to the end of the queue!

What is the difference between a jeweller
and a prison warden?
One sells watches the other watches cells!

Enjoy the meeting.

Cheers Claudia.



PRESIDENT'S PRATTLE **President's Report November 2024**

Bill Mutch

Hello everyone,

It's great to see more sunshine around! Here's a fun challenge for you—try solving this riddle: *How can you make eight eights add up to 1000?* Let me know your answer at the meeting!

On a personal note, I don't have much club news to share, as I've been on the sick list. My leukaemia and Parkinson's have been causing some difficulties, leading to frequent hospital visits. Unfortunately, I'll miss our Christmas lunch at the lovely beachside venue, a place where I've conducted many weddings. I'm disappointed to be absent, as I'll be in the hospital that day.

Allan Verry presented his topic "Cuba" with such passion that it brought a tear or two to my eyes, as it reminded me of when my wife and I visited in 1999. My wife wasn't impressed and vowed never to return. However, because I speak Spanish, I was sent on a business trip in 2004 to assist some buyers, though the trip wasn't successful business-wise. As I write, Hurricane Oscar is hitting Cuba, so I'm especially thinking of the people there.

For those considering a visit to Cuba or Uruguay, a little Spanish goes a long way, but rest assured, the locals are very friendly. And here are some travel tips if you do go:

- **Drink only bottled water**, even for brushing your teeth. Buy from busy large shops, as smaller stores sometimes refill bottles.
- In Cuba, many people live rent-free in government-owned housing, and wages average about \$17 a month. Iconic classic cars are also government-owned; they're used for tourism and cost around \$30 an hour to hire.
- **Public infrastructure** can be a challenge. Buildings can be unsafe, and locals often walk in the streets. Most shops are open-air (no glass windows) since air conditioners aren't practical with regular power cuts from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. because of a diesel shortage caused by Russia not supplying fuel.
- A new long-distance train was introduced in 2019 to appeal to tourists, but it's quite slow due to poor track conditions. Interestingly, most tourists are from Canada.
- Tourists are the biggest money earners in Cuba, but the locals don't use Visa or MasterCard. They use local Peso or US dollars, which must not be marked or torn. Cuba is broke, and locals often rely on ration book food.

Alan's talk was both informative and heartfelt, and it reminded us how different life can be in other parts of the world.

Cheers,
Bill

**CUBAN RAILS AND AMERICAN CLASSICS:
A JOURNEY THROUGH CUBA'S PAST AND PRESENT**
GUEST SPEAKER ALAN VERRY
WHISPER AI & CHATGPT AI



Alan Verry shares captivating photos and stories from his travels in Cuba

Stepping into great shoes after Allan's presentation last month on Mississippi's paddle steamers, I was approached by Noel and Bill to share my own experiences. I'd just completed a whirlwind 30-day journey across the United States, travelling over 28,000 km by train. After two back-to-back U.S.-focused talks, I thought something different might be in order, so I'm here to tell you about my February-March 2017 adventure in Cuba.

The trip was organized by PTG Tours, a British travel company specializing in rail excursions. Originally founded as the Portuguese Traction Group to preserve diesel engines in Portugal, PTG has since expanded, taking travellers to intriguing destinations around the world. When I saw Cuba listed in their 2017 catalogue, I knew that was the place for me. Our group included 35 travellers from the UK, America, and even the Southern Hemisphere—Paul from Melbourne, me from New Zealand—and we all converged in Havana for what would become an unforgettable journey.

Cuba, just 93 miles from the USA, 130 miles from Mexico, and the largest island in the Caribbean, has a rich and complex history. With about 11 million people, two million of whom live in Havana, it's an ancient land by New World standards. Christopher Columbus landed here on his second voyage in 1492, claiming it for Spain, which held onto the island until the Spanish-American War in 1898. There was a brief period of self-rule where American influence dominated. That ended with Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. Today, although often called "communist" in the West, Cuba presents a welcoming and vibrant face to its visitors.

Our rail itinerary took us through 12 of Cuba's 16 provinces, using the tourist currency, the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC), which is pegged to the American dollar. Cuba's rail history is surprisingly deep, with trains running as early as 1837. That's three years before New Zealand's Treaty of Waitangi was signed! Our journey included trips on historic tracks, like the Havana to Bejucal route, covering major cities such as Matanzas, Santa Clara, and Santiago de Cuba, and extending all the way to the famed Guantanamo Bay, where we travelled within 100 meters of the U.S. military base.

In many ways, Cuba is a place apart. The tour brochure captured this, warning us of an "adventure" with Soviet-style bureaucracy, saying things might not go as planned, but that was part of the charm. Facilities could be unavailable, bookings could shift, and we'd be wise to keep our expectations flexible. That's exactly what made it special. We were cautioned to expect "mañana," Cuban style. But despite the occasional logistical hiccup, Cuba's character shone through—1950s cars lined the streets, and steam locomotives chugged along rustic tracks.



Classic American cars such as this 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air are iconic symbols of Cuba's unique charm

To avoid complications with the U.S. embargo, I flew through Panama City to Havana, adding a side journey along the Panama Canal Railway to the Atlantic coast at Colón. Panama itself was fascinating—a vibrant, historic city and a hub for many international companies. After some solo adventures by bus and train, I joined my tour group in Cuba.

In Havana, we spent the first evening dining together and getting to know our fellow travellers. The warmth of our hosts and the traditional Cuban music set the tone. But the music was only the beginning. Our guide, Angelina, along with our local Cuban guide, Daisy, gave us rich insight into Cuban life, history, and of course, Spanish—as spoken uniquely in Cuba.

Everywhere, there were signs of Cuba's storied past. Havana's colonial fort, with cannons from centuries past, and squares lined with vibrant, historic architecture painted in bold colours, were evidence of its resilience. Cubans might lack material wealth, but they take pride in their appearance and their surroundings. While old American cars remain symbols of Cuba's resourcefulness, with many now sporting replaced engines and modified interiors, they offer a retro aesthetic that feels surprisingly fresh.

In Havana, we had the pleasure of staying in a charming hotel right in the heart of the city square. Our accommodation in Cuba was genuinely comfortable and added to the whole experience. While exploring, I encountered a delightful scene in one of the squares. I stumbled upon an old locomotive that had once been abandoned on the beach. It had been beautifully restored and placed on temporary tracks, giving visitors the chance to enjoy a little nostalgic fun with it. I even got a quick shot of it—just for the record!

The square itself sits close to Cuba's main railway station, and as I wandered around, I snapped some shots of two classic carriages from the historic Trans-Europe Expresses that used to travel between countries like France and Germany in the '70s and '80s. These carriages were an iconic part of European rail history, and here they were, still in use, albeit no longer in pristine condition. The French, along with several other countries, donated various old train models to Cuba, so you'll see a mix of rolling stock from all over the world in Havana.

One special treat on this journey was our own chartered Budd railcar, a stainless steel beauty built in Canada in the 1950s. Budd railcars are still used on the Toronto to Vancouver line, and this one was the last functional Budd car in Cuba. It had been lovingly maintained by a group of rail enthusiasts who covered the restoration costs themselves. The railcar, numbered 2301, became our steady ride throughout Cuba, stocked with drinks and ready to take us across the island in true style.



The Budd Rail Diesel Car (RDC) is a self-propelled diesel multiple unit (DMU) railcar

Our first station stop was Bejucal, marking the oldest track in Cuba, originally laid to connect Havana and Bejucal—a 35-kilometre stretch. Upstairs in the station is a quaint railway museum showcasing Cuba's rail history, which felt deeply connected to the relaxed, unhurried atmosphere of the island. Here, you never saw a strict police presence or heard honking cars; we could hop off wherever we liked, a rare freedom I hadn't expected.

We saw many of Cuba's eclectic buildings, some emblazoned with images of Fidel, Che, and others, proudly celebrating the nation's revolutionary icons. I particularly enjoyed Cuba's strong musical culture, and one memorable night, some American travellers suggested we head to the Buena Vista Social Club. The performance was incredible—a truly authentic and unforgettable part of our Cuban journey.

Breakfast at our hotel came with sweeping rooftop views of Havana. While the hotel was well-maintained, the reality of economic hardship was visible in many places. Canada, notably, helped finance the airport, and

we passed one exhibit dedicated to Cuba's legacy as a rum producer, which cleverly incorporated railway history into its displays.

Of course, no trip to Cuba would be complete without learning about sugar mills and cigars. Cuba remains a significant sugar producer, and we visited an operational mill. We also visited a cigar factory, where workers showed us the intricate process of making cigars. Though I'm no smoker, it was fascinating to see the pride and skill that went into each hand-rolled cigar.



A factory worker meticulously crafting a hand-rolled Cuban cigar

From the opposite side of Havana Harbour, we took a short ferry to Casablanca. Due to past hijacking attempts, the crossing required full airport-style security, even though it only took about five minutes! Casablanca is where the Hershey line begins, a rail line that the Hershey chocolate company originally built to service its sugar mills. In a unique twist, the Hershey line now uses old train units donated by Barcelona, adding yet another layer of international flavour to Cuba's rail heritage.

As we travelled further from Havana, I noticed how the country's rugged, hilly landscape brought a distinct beauty to the surroundings. We eventually reached the sugar railway, the home of Cuba's last commercially operated steam locomotives. Cuba is a treasure trove of vintage steam engines, possibly more than anywhere else on Earth.

The tracks themselves were often humble, especially by modern standards, but it added to the charm and sense of adventure. Our train had free rein to stop along level crossings so we could capture the moment with photos—a common sight that made Cuba's laid-back style all the more endearing. Cars, horse carts, and buses would simply wait, without a single horn honking, for us tourists to complete our photographic missions.

Beyond the railways, I was struck by the contrasts in Cuban life. We saw lively street scenes, the juxtaposition of tourist buses with horse-drawn carts, and locals transporting refrigerators on the backs of carts. At one point, we rode on a 1955 General Motors G8 locomotive—a model nearly identical to one that New Zealand Railways once used.

When we reached the town of Trinidad, we stayed in a lovely hotel surrounded by ceramic-tiled, colonial-style buildings. Cuba's hospitality infrastructure for tourists is impressive, with holiday hotels and restaurants designed to reflect a progressive, welcoming nation, even amid challenges.

Throughout this journey, I found that Cuba's beauty lies in its complex intersections—of history and modernity, of hardship and pride. Every mile of rail, every sugar mill, and every street scene added a new layer to the experience, making our time there more than just a trip; it was a deep dive into Cuba's heart and soul.

SURPRISES AT THE ALDERMAN COFFEE MORNING

Vince Middeldorp & Copilot AI



Merilyne and Noel Rose with John Mihaljevic at the coffee morning

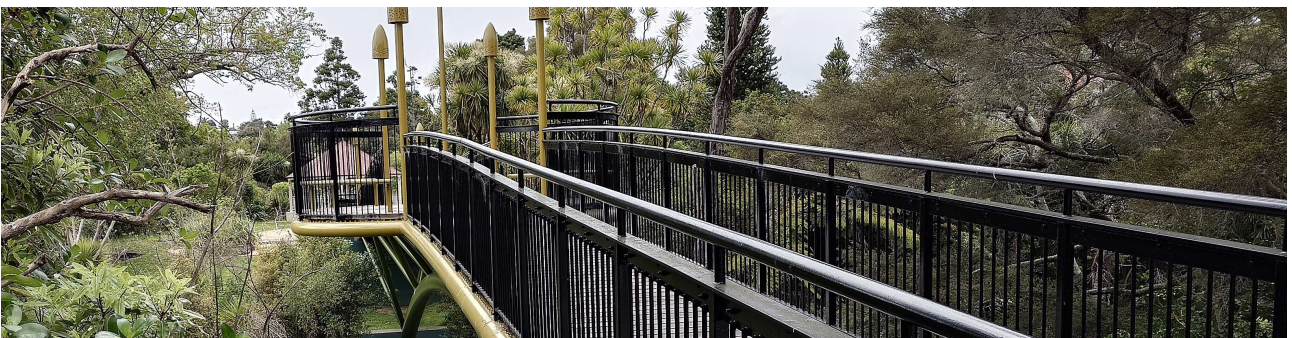
At The Alderman in Henderson, the coffee morning was full of surprises. The biggest one for me was spotting Alan Babich and Rodger Hallen sitting by the back windows. The operators of The Alderman were caught off guard by the number of attendees, and it showed. When I approached the counter, I was asked if I was with the group that had booked in, and then informed that orders would be taken at the tables. Paying for my flat white on the way out was also a novel experience—it is typically the case that you order and pay at the counter before finding a seat.

The reason for this change was Ian Smith’s estimate of 12 attendees, but over three times that number showed up from the West Auckland and Waitakere Combined clubs. The turnout was impressive, but it came with an unexpected challenge: All the free parking in the Edmonton Road – Alderman Drive car park was taken, and the paid parking was just like at the zoo, with card payment machines that only accept credit cards, not EFTPOS.

We knew Alan Babich had been away due to a rough patch, losing his wife Jo to cancer, and then taking an extended holiday overseas. Rodger Hallen’s situation was more mysterious. He emailed us in August 2022 in reply to a coffee morning reminder. His email said, “Apologies, enjoying the sunshine on the Gold Coast.” After that, Rodger disappeared from our radar.

At the coffee morning, Rodger shared his story. He explained that he had returned home and was working in his garden when he experienced a health issue that landed him in Auckland Hospital. The health challenges he described were serious, but he ended his tale on a positive note: his doctors had told him they didn’t want to see him any more, to which he quipped that he felt the same way about them. This sounds promising, and we hope to see Rodger again at future meetings and outings.

Reflecting on the parking issue, I realised there’s plenty of free parking at the West Wave swimming pool, which is virtually next door to The Alderman. A stream called the Waikumete Stream separates the two, but you can walk over a very artistic footbridge to get from West Wave to The Alderman. I wish I had informed everyone about this alternative parking option.



Footbridge from West Wave Aquatic Centre over the Waikumete Stream to Falls Park and The Alderman

TRAVEL INSURANCE UPDATE IN REBUS CHRONICLES

Vince Middeldorp & Copilot AI

In the October issue of Rebus Chronicles, Garth Dutton, the Rebus Board Chairman, highlighted the travel insurance available to Rebus Club members.

The inclusion of travel insurance in the Rebus Chronicles is part of the Board's initiative to review the current process. They invite all members to share their feedback—whether critical or complimentary—about the existing system. The item concludes with, “We look forward to hearing from you.”

A visit to the Rebus NZ website reveals International Brokers Willis Towers Watson were consulted to provide worldwide insurance options suitable for our age group. After careful consideration, the Board recommended a policy issued and managed by Allianz Partners, underwritten by The Hollard Insurance Company Pty Ltd. This is an Australian company with a financial strength rating of A (Strong) from Standard and Poor's.

Previously, claims were capped at \$100,000, but as of January 2024, the limit has been removed. There is now no cap on the medical expenses section of the policy.

As you would expect, pre-existing medical conditions (PEMC) require an additional premium.

Allianz Partners offers an online quote system that allows members to explore various excess options, impacting the premium. This system enables comparisons to be made between Allianz quotes and those from other insurers.

For more information, visit the Rebus NZ website and click on [Travel Insurance](#).



A powerful 7.5-magnitude earthquake has struck off the coast of Taiwan at 7.58am local time (12.58pm NZST), rocking the en...

[More Travel Advisories](#)

Quote

Select Plan

Details

Payment

Select Category ?

Leisure Outbound Leisure Domestic

Travel Start Date ?

Travel End Date ?

12 MONTHS

Travelling to ?



Number of adults ?

Age of adults

Number of dependent children ?

GET QUOTE >

The making of an online application does not obligate you to accept the quote

NEXT COFFEE MORNING

Vince Middeldorp

Join us for our next coffee morning at Gloria Jean's Café, located in The Boundary shopping centre. We'll meet on Wednesday, 27th November, starting at 10:00 am.

We have fond memories of this spot from when it was an Esquires Café. Although the café now operates under the Gloria Jean's franchise, the ownership remains the same. The café was briefly closed for rebranding, during which the interior was refurbished, enhancing its ambience significantly.



A good turnout of members at Gloria Jean's Café in The Boundary shopping centre

Both Ian Smith and I recommend parking at the Newington Road car park rather than the main car park on Vitasovich Avenue.

One of the perks of this location is its proximity to large stores like Kmart, Chemist Warehouse, and Briscoes, making it a great spot for post-coffee shopping.

UPDATE ON UPCOMING EVENTS

Last Thursday (31st October), Ian Smith shared the latest figures from Heather Dixson at the Waitakere Combined Rebus Club regarding the trip to Wenderholm/Puhi and the Christmas Lunch at McHugh's of Cheltenham. The figures show that 29 people have booked for the trip, and 27 are attending the Christmas Lunch.

Ian Smith has made a booking for 30 people at McHugh's, which means there are only a few spots left.

In October, Christmas seemed far away, so some members may have delayed paying for the Christmas Lunch. Now that we are in November, Christmas is just around the corner.

If you would like to join the Christmas Lunch, please pay \$50 (or \$100 if booking for two persons) into the West Auckland Men's Rebus account. The bank account number is 38-9022-0402722-00.

If you have health concerns that might affect your ability to attend, please book your spot anyway. You can cancel if needed, and as long as you cancel by the day before the Christmas Lunch, we will refund your money in full.

SUPPORTERS



Our meetings are held at 10:00 am on the **2nd Friday of each month at New Lynn Friendship Hall**, located at 3063 Great North Road. The date for our December meeting is Friday, 13th December.