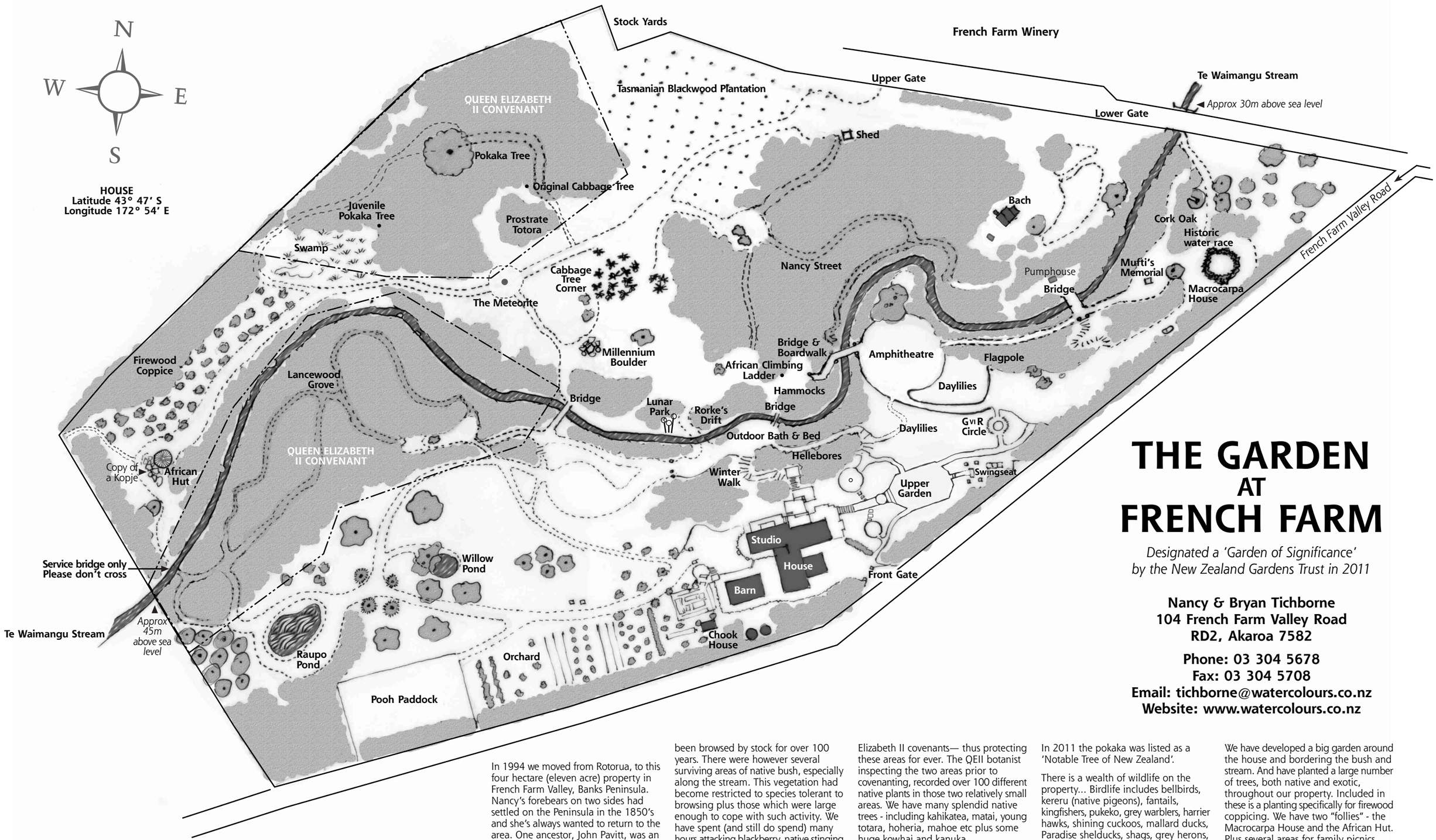

THE GARDEN AT FRENCH FARM

Designated a 'Garden of Significance' by the New Zealand Gardens Trust in 2011

Nancy & Bryan Tichborne
104 French Farm Valley Road
RD2, Akaroa 7582

Phone: 03 304 5678
Fax: 03 304 5708
Email: tichborne@watercolours.co.nz
Website: www.watercolours.co.nz

In 1994 we moved from Rotorua, to this four hectare (eleven acre) property in French Farm Valley, Banks Peninsula. Nancy's forebears on two sides had settled on the Peninsula in the 1850's and she's always wanted to return to the area. One ancestor, John Pavitt, was an early sawmiller in Robinson's Bay and another, Daniel Watkins, was the first English doctor in Akaroa. A great-grandfather, Stephen Watkins, was an Akaroa artist and horticulturist and in fact at one stage taught art at Mr Baker's School at French Farm.

The land we purchased had been part of a large cattle and sheep farm and had been browsed by stock for over 100 years. There were however several surviving areas of native bush, especially along the stream. This vegetation had become restricted to species tolerant to browsing plus those which were large enough to cope with such activity. We have spent (and still do spend) many hours attacking blackberry, native stinging nettle *(onga onga)* and the unpalatable-to-stock *Muehlenbeckia complexa* vine. Once the stock were removed, regeneration started immediately— a rewarding and heartening thing to see! It is now hard to recall how bare some areas of our property were...

In 2003 two bush areas totalling around one hectare were put into Queen Elizabeth II covenants— thus protecting these areas for ever. The QEII botanist inspecting the two areas prior to covenanting, recorded over 100 different native plants in those two relatively small areas. We have many splendid native trees - including kahikatea, matai, young totara, hoheria, mahoe etc plus some huge kowhai and kanuka.

Our most significant tree though must be the one and only mature pokaka. Botanists estimate it is between 200 and 300 years old and think it may be the largest specimen of its type in Banks Peninsula if not the whole country. We have recently located a juvenile pokaka, fascinating in its wide variety of leaf shapes and sizes.

In 2011 the pokaka was listed as a 'Notable Tree of New Zealand'.

There is a wealth of wildlife on the property... Birdlife includes bellbirds, kereru (native pigeons), fantails, kingfishers, pukeko, grey warblers, harrier hawks, shining cuckoos, mallard ducks, Paradise shelducks, shags, grey herons, Californian quail etc. The stream is full of native fish including banded kokopu, eels, whitebait, lampreys, bullies etc. Not so welcome are the occasional possum, rabbits, hares, stoats, magpies and wild cats. Introduced by us are some very well behaved chickens. Our much loved (and internationally famous) cat Mufti died in 2001— a memorial to her can be found in the lower part of our garden.

We have developed a big garden around the house and bordering the bush and stream. And have planted a large number of trees, both native and exotic, throughout our property. Included in these is a planting specifically for firewood coppicing. We have two "follies" - the Macrocarpa House and the African Hut. Plus several areas for family picnics, barbeques and general rest & recreation.

We love our property and feel privileged to be "borrowing" it for a while. We hope you enjoy your visit to our little piece of paradise.

Nancy & Bryan

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