The 1981 Springbok Tour - can you help us make history?

**Jamie Mackay**

**Message**

Posted: Mon May 01, 2006 11:49 am   Post subject: The 1981 Springbok Tour - can you help us make history?

The 25th anniversary of the 1981 Springbok Tour is coming up and we're planning a feature on nzhistory.net.nz to mark the occasion.

This is one of those topics where it seems anyone who lived through it and who was old enough to know what was going on has an anecdote to tell or memory to recall.

We'd love to hear your stories, so if you would like to contribute to this project, please either reply to this discussion topic (you will need to register first) or, if you prefer, send your memories to me at webmaster@mch.govt.nz.

We will then take a selection of these contributions and include them with the feature we are developing. (Please indicate if you would prefer yours was anonymous).


and also check this on the NZ Film Archive site: [http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/archive_presents/1981/shootingback.html](http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/archive_presents/1981/shootingback.html)

cheers,
Jamie Mackay

Added 24 July: and here is where we've got to so far: [http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/springbok-tour](http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/springbok-tour)

Last edited by Jamie Mackay on Thu Aug 31, 2006 10:53 am; edited 4 times in total

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**KiwiGrim**

**Message**

Posted: Mon May 29, 2006 12:09 pm   Post subject:
I grew up in a small town in South Canterbury where my father was the Presbyterian Minister. After he spoke out against the Springbok tour in Church he was on the receiving end of a number of abusive phone calls. I particularly remember sitting in the lounge and hearing people yelling at him down the phoneline and being amazed that these people were so-called Christians. Some even threatened to never go to church again while he was there. Amazing!

I, personally, had quite a promising rugby career ahead of me, having made the South Canterbury reps. However, I chose to stop playing rugby and started playing Association Football (Soccer) as a form of protest against the Tour. In small town and rural New Zealand, it seemed that the communities were divided (rather unequally) and that to make a stand against the tour was to put one's head on the proverbial chopping block.

To this day, I don't regret my decision, even though I may well have benefitted from staying in the rugby arena, particularly with the advent of professionalism.

One of the most memorable episodes of that period was travelling to Christchurch with my family to hear Bishop Desmond Tutu speak at the Cathedral in the Square. He struck me as exceedingly reasonable, charismatic and brave. I will never forget the feeling.

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Thanks for getting the ball rolling, KiwiGrim. Would be great to get some more.

I was 14 and my strongest memory is of being in the protest march outside Rugby Park in Hamilton with my sister and mum. We were all yelling 'Amandla!, Amandla Soweto!' (I had no idea what this meant)* and '1,2,3,4 We don't want your racist tour!'.

Someone in the crowd with a transistor radio heard the announcement that the leading bunch of protestors had breached the fence and invaded Rugby Park! A wave of fear and excitement rippled through the crowd - we were now in a war zone. Mum and I were particularly concerned as we knew my older brother had...
been at the front of the march. Some of the spectators in front of us were hurling beer cartons at the protestors.

The front line of protestors had ripped down the fence and the first 300 or so had rushed onto the field before the police (?) managed to barricade the gap. Those of us still outside could only tell what was going on via the radio (and from the roaring crowd on the other side of the now flimsy-looking fence!) - and what we were hearing was very, very scary.

Police were arresting the protesters one by one, each protestor getting abuse and bottles hurled at them as they were dragged off. Then we heard that a protestor was threatening to fly over/into? into the Park in a plane - whatever that meant. Eventually (after an hour or so) the police called off the match, at which time things got really bad!

By this time we had realised that my brother was in the middle and had gone around to the other side of the grounds where some of the protestors were being 'escorted' out by the police. He was not one of the lucky ones to be arrested, however, and after the game was called off had to make a run for freedom with only a loose police cordon separating him from the thousands of now very angry - and in many cases, intoxicated - rugby fans.

Luckily he managed to escape with just a few punches to the face. We were able to retrieve him and escape before the ugly scenes that followed as thousands of anti-protestors left the grounds, some taking matters into their own hands chasing and beating up any protestors they could find.

* In fact a colleague has just told me the chant was actually ‘Amandla Ngawethu’, meaning ‘Power to the People’

UPDATE
I sent this to my brother for comment, and here is his reply - he says it much better than me!

**Quote:**

Wow, is it really 25 years. I find the whole experience quite daunting to remember. I recall being on the plane to the UK a couple of years later and reading *By Batons and Barbed Wire* and it made me tremble and cry a bit - the person in the next seat to me turned out to be a policeman who had felt it was the hardest thing he had been through in his career as a cop.

What I can remember about that particular day is:

- My flatmate wanted to be right at the front where the action was, I wasn't so keen but went along. The front row of people had helmets and padded jackets on and were clearly organised for action.

- Ripping down the fence took about 10 seconds - it was very fast, the crowd on the bank pulled away from us and a flood of people went through and onto the ground, we ran under the goal posts into the middle. I remember the priests struggling with a bloody big cross

- The police took some time to respond and at first seemed confused if they should be facing us or facing the crowd. They actually tried to push us off, but 30 cops pushing 300 people wasn't very effective. I recall them trying to snatch one or two people but the protestors just sat down, linked arms and it was clear it would take several hours to clear us off that way so
they gave up.

- They did a lot of talking via a loud hailer, one or two protestors walked off at that stage, most didn't. The crowd got wilder and wilder and the police focussed on stopping the fans who tried to run on the pitch to get to us.

- Some of the protestors talked about dropping nails or broken glass on the pitch, they got shouted down by the rest of us.

- There was a lot of press there and we chanted "The whole world's watching" along with all the other chants

- It was terrifying, I don't know how big the crowd was but they were clearly furious - bottles and god knows what else hurled at us and people kept trying to get onto the pitch, the police looked vulnerable as they spread out around the whole ground.

- When they finally announced it was over, it took a while for the protestors to accept that it wasn't a trick. That was the first we heard about the plane - I don't think the protestors on the field knew anything about it

- When we left I got separated from the rest, a cop grabbed me by the collar and pushed me towards an exit. There were several fans there with beer bottles who came at me, I turned away back into the ground but the cop grabbed me again and threw me through the middle of the fans. I think I got hit a few times as I went past, but I was outside quite quickly and just high tailed it out of there

- I do remember meeting up with you and Mum back at the car - that was a relief. Dad said he had recognised me on the TV. My photo was in a few papers (including a photo of the cop chucking me out with the caption "...and his feet never even touched the ground". I got recognised at Uni, some supportive, some not. Very weird, I lost some friends that was unexpected, some others seemed to think I was more interesting, I changed in others eyes but I was the same person myself. I didn't feel like I had been brave, just swept along with others and then been as scared as I have ever been. I remember being convinced that that would be the end of the tour and really hating Muldoon when he turned it into an election ploy.

- I remember later in the tour going to a rally in Wellington and there was an ANC speaker who talked of people in Soweto watching it on TV's in shop windows - that was the greatest feeling - made it feel worthwhile, I hope it was true!

It is still very clear in my mind, I do think about it occasionally. It can still make me tremble a bit.

Jamie Mackay

Posted: Fri Jul 21, 2006 4:08 pm   Post subject:

Joined: 27 Jun 2004   Posts: 92

Just to let you know that we have now launched our Springbok Tour feature:

http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/springbok-tour

We will be adding more to it in the coming months as the 25th anniversary of key events come around.
We're still hoping for more recollections from people so we can start incorporating these, so don't be shy!

Jamie

Nick Perrin

Posted: Mon Jul 24, 2006 11:07 pm   Post subject: The 1981 Springbok Tour

As a 7 year old going on 8, I remember the 1956 Springbok tour vividly. The match against Wairarapa-Bush in the mid-week was deemed educational enough for the entire school to go along to Masterton Memorial Park ("Cameron and Soldiers Memorial Park", the home of Masterton Rugby club) to see the match, at which we marvelled at the Springbok captain, S.S. Viviers, who had a moustache (unheard of in those days of clean-shaven, short back and sides kiwis).

Questions of race were not in my consciousness then, but in 1959 I remember our headmaster/teacher at Harley St School in Masterton mentioned the issue of Maoris not being welcome in the forthcoming tour of South Africa. Later he informed us that the issue had been circumvented by the NZRFU deeming no Maori were good enough to be selected, but I remember feeling a sense of outrage. I must have been radicalised at an early age - thank you, Hamish Henderson for teaching me so well!

My mother's brother Norm Haddy was a stalwart of the Petone Rugby Club for many years, serving as Club Captain for most of the years between 1945 and his death in the 1980s as I remember. He took Petone to South Africa on a tour, and I remember he thought one of the Maori members (Vern Winitana - nominate him for a royal honour!) was a fool for refusing to go. My uncle was certainly a friend of South Africa, having served in the desert with some of them during the war. I left the arguments with him on the subject to my sister, but I was certainly on her side.

In 1981 my now wife, flatmates and friends joined a demonstration against the tour one Friday night in a peaceful demonstration in Wellington. This was followed by a major rally on the day of the big match at Athletic Park that my friends and I joined, gathering in Kent/Cambridge Terrace to march on Athletic Park before the match was due to take place. I was disturbed by the crash helmets and cardboard armour reinforced with tightly-rolled newspapers that many people wore, and that was also offered to us, and which I refused on the basis that I was a pacifist (none of my part accepted any armour either). I was prepared to obey any legal order to disperse, and not to resist. I was there to
show solidarity by my presence (what a wimp!)

We marched around the Basin Reserve and up Adelaide Road and past the hospital in Riddiford Street to the intersection of Rintoul Street just below the eastern entrance to Athletic Park where a policeman directed us to right-wheel and stop, blocking the bottom of Rintoul Street. At no stage did I hear any instruction from police to disperse, and we stood there waiting. One person was beaten to a bloody pulp by police in front of us (but he had attacked them in deranged manner), and then a lone ranting rugby fan waded through us, trampling people and swearing, demanding his right to go to Athletic Park.

Nothing happened immediately after the transit of the lone fan until a double column of police can stamping along the footpath on the west side of Riddiford/Rintoul St intersection, chanting "Move! Move! Move!" which I was churlish enough not to accept as legal request to do so, as we had been given no such request before we were attacked.

The column piled into us, and a sergeant from Lower Hutt who I knew by sight grabbed me by the wrists. I did not resist at all, and he dragged me rather gently from the second rank of protesters and pushed me down the footpath. I took half a dozen steps and turned around to see my now wife, friends and a few other people being treated about the same as I had been, and saw other protesters who were resisting being beaten by long batons.

Before I was removed from the ranks of protesters, the windows of the shop behind me caved in as police shoved protesters into them. I thought it was a senseless bit of violence on the part of the police.

I sensed that the sergeant was rather reluctant to do what he was doing, and he certainly wasn't a zealout like the Red and Blue police squads were populated by. I respect him for that.

As my party of friends regrouped away from the battle, one friend was quite distraught that his girlfriend, who was one of my flatmates was missing. We were relieved to see her in a busload of people arrested, and she was uninjured. Several hours later we picked her up from Wellington Central Police Station, where they had been held and then released without charges.

After that, I don't know how I missed the great battle of Molesworth Street, but I was amused by a number of my work colleagues who demonstrated in Lower Hutt and got arrested for sitting on the Ewen Bridge.

Even though we were all moderate rugby fans, we boycotted TV coverage of the matches, although we felt compelled to watch the antics at the abandoned Hamilton match with the pitch invasion, and the flour-bombing at the Eden Park match. We never knew what the final score was in any match that actually took place, however, and I still don't, nor do I want to.

I think it is well-proven that the events of 1981 made white South Africans realise that apartheid was not acceptable, and ushered in great changes there. I
I am proud to have been there to make a stand, and if it hadn't been for that
sergeant from Lower Hutt who patently was not enjoying himself, my
impressions of the integrity of the NZ police would have been very low.

Perhaps the 1981 tour was the best thing that could have happened to South
Africa. The NZRFU really shot themselves in their collective foot and caused
the fall of white supremacy! Machiavelli would have been proud, I think.

Nick Perrin
Wellington

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Kia ora koutou e hoa ma,

I have deep and vivid memories of the 1981 tour period.

Many of our kaumatua opposed the tour because of the apartheid policies in
South Africa. But there was a real split with our younger ones who actually
played rugby. It created a lot of discussion amongst our rangatahi.

The general feeling amongst our elders was that there was not much difference
between South African apartheid policies and our own that were cloaked in
euphemistic terminology that basically delivered the same inequalities between
Maori and non-Maori. They therefore opposed the tour because that would also
send a loud message to our policy makers to get NZs "house" in order also. To
their credit I'm sure our policy makers did take notice and changed a few of
their blatantly racist policies.

Our elders also proposed a rahui on rugby altogether because as a people we
suffered under its sociological influences (racism, alcoholism, violence were all
promoted within its culture).

Not much was ever reported about the grassroots movement for Maori to turn
their backs on rugby altogether. You can find snippets in the odd book that has
accurately portrayed the impacts of the tour on Maori communities, however for
our elders this was bravely promoted. It was a farsighted proposal, probably
too advanced for many Maori of that time. It seems to me that those brave
souls were up against a tide of resistance because so many Maori players at the
time were unquestioning about the "good" that came from rugby, they were
totally socialised into the whole rugby culture.
What it did however was respark interest in our own traditional ball sports, although, because of their bias towards rugby, many Maori today actually refuse to acknowledge the variety of our own ball sports history.

What is really vividly imprinted in my memory is the way some of the local Pakeha supported our elders at the various hui we held, even though many belonged to our local rugby club. They too were farsighted and appreciative of the damage that rugby had done to us as a people. Rugby was seen that for what it was, a tool for socialising Maori into mainstream culture, and a mainstream way of thinking, bahaving and consuming.

The advanced idea of a rahui on rugby is what I feel so much aroha for concerning our marae leaders of the time. They were true rangatira.

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KiwiCritic

Joined: 01 Aug 2006
Posts: 3
Location: Napier, NZ

Posted: Tue Aug 01, 2006 7:16 pm   Post subject: Napier 81

I remember the day here in Napier, i was 17 had already decided to march when the Bok's got here. Leaving work at lunchtime I joined quite a large crowd at the top of Emerson St and we all began a peaceful march through town. I was shocked by the yelling, abuse and egg throwing that took place, this was my town and we were hated. We had alot of gang members that were helmeted up and obviously expecting trouble. We arrived near McLean Park and sat down in Wellesly Rd/Todd St corner. Then we watched as the Red Squad got out of their bus at the other end of Todd St, assembled and quickly made their way towards the group. We all decided to move as they got close, obviously to the annoyance of the squad, so we shifted our positions to the corner of Latham St and Nelson cres. Sitting again, we linked arms and began singing, I had a mum with her kids on one arm and a gang member on the other. The threats mounted by Police as the game began, eventually the barriers were moved and we were told we had minutes to "get the hell out of here" before the Red Squad moved up in lines, grunting and thrusting their batons forward. Children, Women, the Elderly left as none were prepared for a baton assault, i decided to leave as the first blows came...no helmet, no weapon, hands up...but the police kept swinging.

My attitude to our Police force and the Government changed that day. Most work colleagues, friends and others dislike the fact I took part, all say sport and politics don't mix and can't believe I took "that" side.
Tena koe te whanau,

**1981 SPRINGBOK TOUR - WAIKATO GAME:** I was in the Army and based at the Hamilton Army Office at Knox Street at the time. I had not long returned from a Tour of Duty in Africa where I saw apartheid at first hand, and although I found it embarrassing and humiliating (Fijian friends had been made "Honorary Whites" but were still refused food and drinks in hotel bars in Joburg). I had no actual feelings about the tour one way or the other, as I was a soldier and didn't possess a single political thought, neither did most of my Comrades. I respected that protesters had the right to conduct peaceful protest, but I also expected their right to allow me to watch rugby on a Saturday afternoon in the comfort of my own home.

I had been in the military since 1967, and although not a Vietnam veteran, I had suffered the Vietnam protesters at first hand, the taunts, the gybes, and the spitting at myself and my mates whenever/wherever we appeared in uniform. During the Vietnam War period, although the protests took place most Friday nights throughout New Zealand {{please be aware that back in the 1950's and 1960's Friday night was the busiest period of the entire week in all towns and cities here in Godzone...it all changed with the implementation of 10 O'clock closing and Saturday morning shopping in the late 1970's, were huge}}, they were always peaceful. They marched, they yelled, they chanted...we servicemen watched.

**FRIDAY:** On the Friday night of the Hamilton Springbok in 1981, I was in the Garrison Club (soldiers bar) upstairs in the Army office and the place was pretty much packed. I was with several friends of mine one of whom was Staff Sergeant Gary P, and another Sergeant Rakai T.

At about 1945 (7.45 pm), a well known "retired" Maori soldier and Vietnam veteran (dressed in civilian clothing) stood up and took off his long black coat to reveal that he was wearing his Regimental blazer, complete with Vietnam medals. Gary P. challenged him as to why he was wearing his medals and he replied, "The Cook, myself and our Tamariki (2 daughters) are going on the march uptown."

The friendship between this chap, Gary P. and several other Vietnam veterans was severed in an instant. I couldn't understand the depth of Gary P's anger, but he was a Vietnam veteran and also a Rhodesian (Zimbabwe) veteran, so perhaps the answer lies somewhere in-between.

**SATURDAY:** On the Saturday afternoon, myself and friends were kicked back
at Hopuhopu Army Camp with a carton of beers and ready to watch the rugby
game. I am no rugby fanatic, but would watch two flies crawling up a wall if
one of them was wearing New Zealand colours. I/we were astounded at just
how easily the protestors had breached the fence in Hamilton and had spilled
onto the rugby pitch and gathered in a bunch on the field. From memory during
the entire Vietnam War protest period (apart from one near riot in Parakai
Drive in Auckland), Kiwi's had never been so focused, determined and violent).
I was absolutely astounded, and so was everyone else watching the events
unfold in my living room. People actually broke the law and stopped an
international sports event.

Next, protestors started running around the field, only to be tackled and
arrested by what looked like Police Officers in dark blue overalls. When I took
a closer look at several of these guys, I recognised them as fellow soldiers
(Regular Force and Territorial), from the Waikato region. None of them were
Policemen. The game did not take place and I later heard several people
(Rugby supporters) boasting of how they had throw brass and steel nuts at the
protestors as they were being escorted off the rugby field...one of these guys
was arrested and fined $80 NZ.

TUESDAY: On the Tuesday (I think it was Tuesday or Wednesday) in the
Hamilton Army Office it was business as usual. About mid-morning we
received a hurried phone call from an undercover Policeman who was in the
middle of a group of several hundred protestors. He warned us that the mob
was heading for our location as they had discovered that soldiers had been
arresting protestors at the Rugby game. There were about a dozen of us in the
actual office which was quite large and covered an area about the same size as
three large houses. We immediately sprang into action and started locking all
of the doors and windows as we had 2 x APC's and several field guns which
were readily accessible through the transport door.

A short time later, (I guess about five or ten minutes later), a large group of
protestors arrived outside of our office. They were in fact very well behaved,
and more than a little frightened of us, I guess they figured we were dripping
with weapons and ammunition, so they didn't push their luck by attempting to
enter the office or any other the other buildings. (The only thing of any
consequence I was actually carrying was a ball point pen). At about the same
time several carloads of Police and Detectives arrived and came into the office
and stood outside of the front door. Then a middle-aged woman, and I think a
single female supporter were given permission to enter our office and confront
Warrant Officer Tom TK and myself. The woman was very well spoken, and
identified herself as either "Professor" or "Doctor" such-and-such from
Waikato University.

She was holding a sheaf of about a dozen black and white photographs about
10" x 12" several of which showed her being tackled and detained by a man in
a dark set of overalls (her assailant was Sergeant Rakai T). She let us study the
pics for several minutes, and I recognised a number of soldiers immediately;
the photographs were very sharp and had obviously been taken by a
professional with a telephoto lens.
The woman stated that she was here to confront Warrant Officer Tom TK as she believed that he was the man in the photograph. Tom identified himself to the Lady and said at no time was he anywhere near the rugby game. The Lady refused to believe him (and by the way, the chap in the pic was Sergeant Rakai T and he was drinking coffee in the very next room and keeping a low profile), so Tom TK produced his identity card, which ended the matter. Throughout this interaction a detective was taking notes and at one point the woman made the statement "When I was tackled by this man I asked him if I was to be arrested to which he replied 'No you stupid bitch, I'm gonna feed you to the crowd'." Very obviously at the point the Lady had feared for her safety.

From memory, the above Lady was processed through the courts and received a $600 NZD fine.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Another Waikato soldier, Peter B was a very senior official in rugby circles, and as well was very familiar with "Concertina, Tanglefoot and Dannert" ...these are obstacles made from barbed wire, and if you know your history then you will remember that every other rugby match was played inside of some serious barbed wire obstacles. Unfortunately, the protestors came from the entire spectrum of Kiwi society, so shortly after the Hamilton non/match, myself and friends were once again propped over several boxes of good Waikato draught, and ready to watch the (Dunedin I think) match...when some nameless "word unrepeatable" person or persons, climbed up onto a TVNZ repeater somewhere in the Deep South and knocked it out....end result, no TV transmission to Hopuhopu Army Camp...I was very angry as I respected his/her right to peaceful protest, however he/she had obviously broken the law and shut down an entire TV coverage, which impacted on my right to watch sport on TV.

**IN HINDSIGHT:** Hindsight gives all of us 20/20 vision, and having watched a recent in depth TV programme on the actual impact that the New Zealand protestors made in the mindset of the Afrikaner politicians, I must admit that politics and sport are forever intertwined, and none of us should ever lose sight of this fact. The world learned that lesson in 1981.

**THE 1960 ALL BLACKS TOUR:** In closing let me say this. I was staying with my Aunty Rama and my Uncle Hone all of those years ago in 1960, when it was announced on National radio that Maori's were forbidden to travel to South Africa as part of the All Black tour. My Aunty and Uncle, and their extended whanau took it on the chin with "oh well, she'll be right," whereas I (a 10 year old pakeha kid), was absolutely embarrassed and ashamed. However, Maori being who they are, and rising to any slight or challenge, rose up in the name of Gerry Merito and the Howard Morrison Quartet. They shortly after produced that very famous ballad which is now a very special part of Kiwiana, called "My Old Man's an All Black." The New Zealand Government learnt a very sharp lesson through that ballad and were shamed by Maori mirth. There was never another racially selected Rugby team...the Afrikaners either received us all as New Zealanders, or they received nothing!
GERRY MERITO - HIS PLACE IN HISTORY: Part of the ballad I have written below, and remember whanau, it is from the memory of a 10 year old kid, however the phrase "fix the guilty one!" was repeated several times during the song, and was an oblique swipe at both the New Zealand Government of the day, and the Afrikaners; and both knew it. Gerry Merito and the Howard Morrison Quartet changed the course of politics and history in both New Zealand and South Africa, and should be remembered for this.

Ka kite,

Mike Subritzky

(Some fragments of the actual ballad appear below, the last verse is correct and the song was produced live on a very antiquated tape recorder in the Pukekohe town hall in 1960. I think from memory, it was the Howard Morrison Quartet's biggest hit).

MY OLD MAN'S AN ALL BLACK

Oh, my old man's an All Black,
He wears the silver fern,
He tackles high and low,
And he gives that ball a turn.


"Son don't you worry if you get punched
When you're down in a scrum,
Just you wait 'til there's a ruck
And you can fix the guilty one!"


Oh, my old man's an All Black,
He wears the silver fern,
But his mates just couldn't take him
So he's out now for a turn.


Well, the All Black team is leaving,
And the best of luck to them,
And if they find things tricky,
They'll have to play like men,
Cause the Springboks will be watching,
From Transval to Capetown,
At the team that ain't got Hori's,
To score their last Touchdown!

So he's out...now...for a turn!

Der dit-dit Da, Der dit dit Da, Dee dit dit Da da Da

So he's out...now...for...a...T-U-R-N!!!

Tahi, Rua, Toro, Wha!
Kick a Springbok out the door!

"FI FI FO FO FUM! Hey Howard?, Hey What? ...There ain't no Hori's in this scrum!"

Der dit-dit Da, Der dit-dit Da, Dee dit-dit Da da Da! HEI !!!

(Note: Tune is from Lonnie Donegan's "My Old Man's a Dustman")