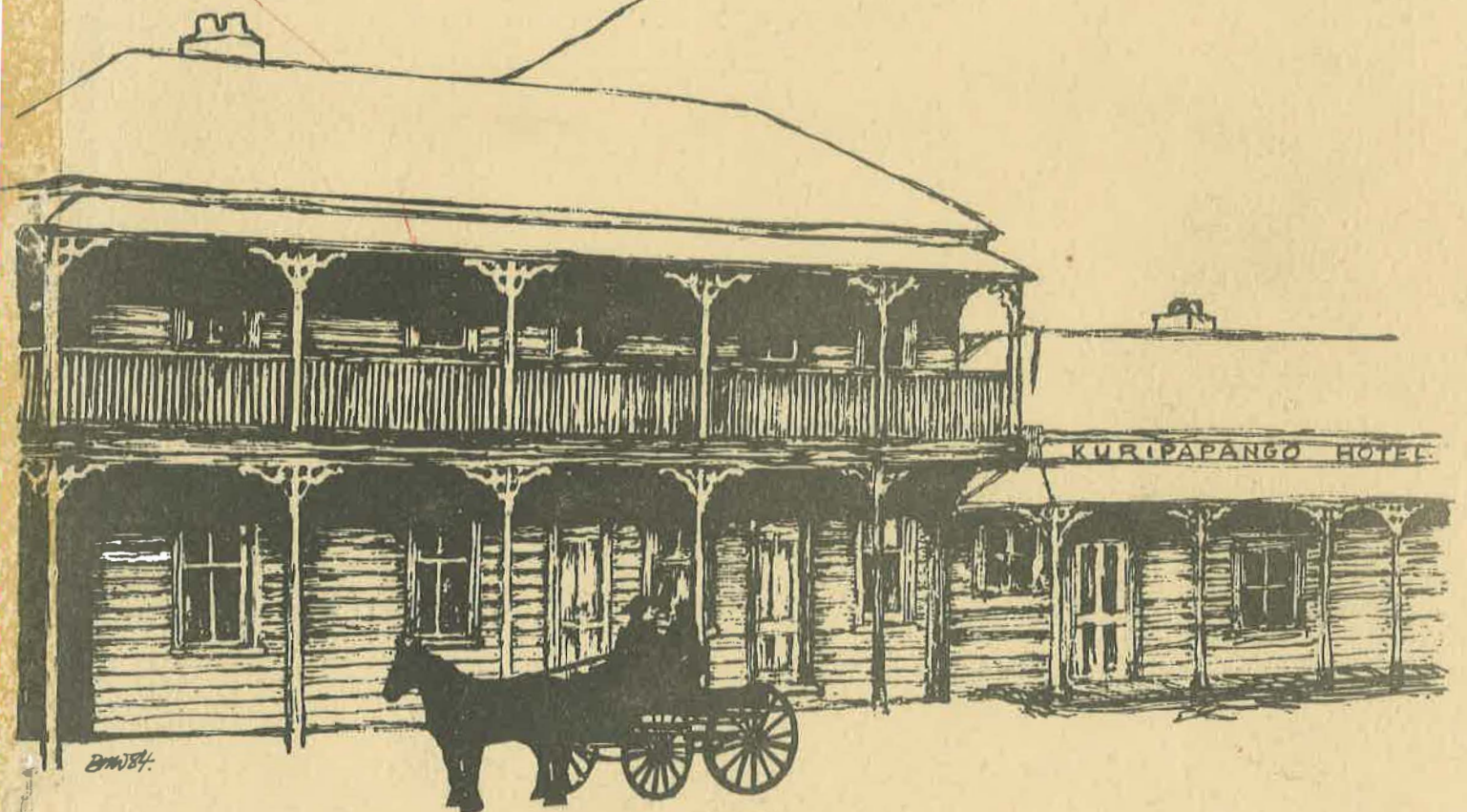
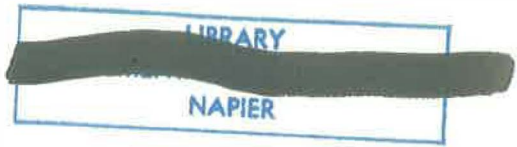


# THE HISTORY OF FARMING AT KURIPAPANGO



PIER  
1984

## Matthew Wright



THE HISTORY OF FARMING  
AT KURIPAPANGO  
1900-1982

MATTHEW WRIGHT

New Zealand Forest Service  
Napier

1984

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### PREAMBLE

This history of farm management at Kuripapango is intended not only to record the course of events but also to dispel some of the 'myths and legends' that have slowly developed over the years, concerning the nature of farming in the area.

One major aim has been to attempt to explain some of the events in terms of the personalities involved, since as will be seen, this had an effect on farm management that was at least as pronounced as the effect of the environment itself.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE  
THE EARLY DAYS

INTRODUCTION

Kuripapango was, during the first half of the twentieth century, relatively inactive, having seen its 'boom' period during the 1890's, when a tourist resort flourished there. By the early 1900's, Kuripapango had become a quiet rural community on the route to Taihape. Farmers attempted to make a living from this land, but the soil was poor and the land harsh, and this, coupled with the economic climate, made farming a continual uphill battle.

The condition of the land was one of the prime factors influencing the nature of farming in the area. At the turn of the century, much of the land was relatively clear and it was possible to run sheep without much difficulty. But as the years went by scrub slowly began to encroach and to reduce the stocking capacity of the land.

Some areas, such as the Blowhard, were in poor condition and only marginally suitable for use from the beginning of the period. The Blowhard had in fact been prime grazing land during the 1870's, when Mangawhare regularly ran sheep on it, and during the 1880's it had been subject to a number of fires that were designed to burn off the inedible growth and to fertilise the soil, thus permitting grazing to

continue for longer than might otherwise have been the case. The slash-and-burn process was effective but essentially one-way in that eventually the land became exhausted. Little then grew and erosion occurred. This was particularly the case on the Blowhard, which had received its name from the high winds prone to blow across it. Devoid of its vegetative cover the thin, pumaceous soil was torn away, leaving virtually no potential for farming.

Throughout the period under consideration, only parts of the Blowhard were suitable for farming. At one stage, Walter Ensor attempted to plough a section of it, and the winds blew away most of his topsoil.

The most productive areas during the early part of the century included a section of Omahaki and much of the Kohinga block, run by David Lumsden and his sons. They were perhaps the most successful of the farmers in the Kuripapango area.

There were in fact only four families living in the area during the period who made even token attempts at working the land: the Lumsdens, the MacDonalds: the Snellings: and the MacRaes.

It is from this that the principal historical problem stems, in that the written records are largely confined to the pre-1900 period. Research on the period under study through interviews with people who remember the area is not entirely satisfactory as a means of gathering information because of several difficulties innate to the interview process.

Firstly, many of the people who were directly involved with the area are no longer alive, and thus the author has had to rely on second and third hand information from those involved only in a peripheral sense. Secondly, the interviews have been essentially subjective in nature, since they involve personal opinion in many cases. Often information from different sources has been contradictory, and allowances have had to be made to account for some of



the differences: often these can be explained in terms of the relationship that the informant had with the person or events about which the information was given. Finally, because reliance has had to be placed on memory, and because those interviewed often knew little of the area in any case, information has in many instances been only very sketchy.

This is not to suggest of course that the interviews were of little value. On the contrary, it would not have been possible to write this report without the help of those interviewed, and the author is extremely grateful to all those who made time available in which to be interviewed.

A number of the individuals contacted were unwilling to be interviewed, due to circumstantial and other reasons, and it was thus not possible to obtain information from them. Others, however, were willing to help in any way that they could.

Because of this help, and despite the difficulties inherent in the interview process, it has been possible to construct a general picture of events and personalities in the area. Dates of land transfers are known, for instance, as are general trends in approaches to farming. The overall image is one of very little change: life went on in Kuripapango with very little to mark one year off from another. There were few events of significance that have stuck in the memories of those that lived there or in adjoining areas.

For these reasons, the history of the Kuripapango region has not taken a narrative approach. Rather, a thematic approach has been made which isolates, and thus permits an easier overview of, the various aspects of farm management in the region. These changed only gradually through the period, and can thus be surveyed more readily in this manner.

Because of the frequently sketchy and contradictory nature of the information some interesting historical problems have been raised.

It is a common misconception that the task of the historian is simply to collect and present the facts about a particular subject. Nothing could be further from the truth: the chronology of events in fact merely provides the basic data from which the historian works. History is essentially an interpretive social science. Particular events and dates are not of importance in themselves, but are seen rather as indicative of broad overall change in particular aspects of the past. Historians develop theories regarding these changes: and it is this that forms the substance of 'history' as a social science.

To draw an analogy from the physical sciences, one does not find, for instance, a biologist interested in determining the long-term effects of animals on a particular area simply leaving his work at the data-collection stage. Interpretation of the evidence in terms of observations must also be made, and conclusions must then be drawn from this. Otherwise the data remains as an essentially meaningless morass of fact.

This is exactly the task that the historian undertakes when writing the history of a particular area. To cite an example concerning Kuripapango, information collected on Rose MacDonald seemed at first to be contradictory in many respects. But it gradually became clear that this information stemmed from observation of differing aspects of the same character. A picture slowly emerged of Rose MacDonald's personality, and once this had been gained it was possible to reconcile some of the more contradictory pieces of evidence into a smooth, unified whole. It was then possible to understand why she behaved in the way that she did. Her personality had, as will be seen, considerable effect on farm management in the area.

If, however, the extant facts had simply been listed, then the reader would have been faced with a morass of contradictory statements and not have gained an understanding of why particular events occurred at Kuripapango.

THE KURIPAPANGO HOTEL

Farming at Kuripapango originated as an offshoot of the hotel business that flourished in the area during the 1890's.

The hotel had been established when, in January 1881, the road into Inland Patea had been completed - not without considerable delay and controversy - as far as Kuripapango. In 1882 two hotels were opened at Kuripapango. One, owned by Alexander MacDonald, was on the western side of the Ngaruroro, and the other, owned by J.G.Kinross, was on the eastern side.<sup>1</sup>

Alexander MacDonald was not a farmer: he was an entrepreneur. He had been born in Edinburgh in 1830, and subsequently worked on the gold fields in California, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> Finding little success here he took up hotel keeping in Taradale, and finally he established the hotel at Kuripapango. His interests were, it would seem, largely financial since within ten years he had established a coaching business, which was run by his son, and also a number of 'service industries' in Kuripapango, such as a blacksmith's shop, a bootmaker, and a general store. This store was the only one in the area, and customers were known to come from as far away as Puketitiri.

Initially, custom at the hotel came mainly from those passing through to stations at the far end of the road. Ngamatea, Erewhon and Orumatua among others all relied on the road through Kuripapango to both bring their supplies in and to take the wool clip out. It was a two-day journey by coach to the end of the road, and the Kuripapango hotels provided overnight accomodation.

Before very long, however, the Maori owner of the land on which MacDonald's hotel stood introduced prohibition on his property. MacDonald then purchased Kinross' hotel and moved his own across the river to stand next to Kinross'. The two buildings then became known as the Kuripapango Hotel, and formed the core of the small but prosperous community centred around

MacDonald's business enterprises.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1890's, MacDonald began advertising Kuripapango as:

"A health resort where, according to the British Medical Journal, the atmosphere is eight degrees drier than in Napier...plenty of fruit and trout...fishing and shooting...horses and buggies for hire..."<sup>4</sup>

The publicity had the desired effect and before long the hotel was doing a booming trade with the tourists from Napier:

"Its bracing air was considered favourable to people inclined to tuberculosis. Ladies and children with peckish appetites were whisked up to Kuripapango to have their gastric juices stirred up by the mountain air. A rest at Kuripapango was fashionable. It was the in-trip socially of the 1890's. It had the modish air of Londoners retiring to the country for the month of August or - with so many ex-Indian families among the settlers - of Empire building Sahibs sending the Memsahibs and children from the plains to the hills in the hot season."<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly part of the popularity of the hotel was due to the quality of service. The linen was always clean and fresh, the guests ate with silver knives and forks, the food was good, and the service was excellent.

During this period, Kuripapango experienced a 'liveliness' not repeated in later years. Tourists regularly arrived from Napier, while from the other direction wagoners would come through with their loads. The hotel was crowded on most nights during the wool season.

Lester Masters has recorded many stories of the period

in his book Tales of the Mails. Most of them are too well known to be worth repeating here, but there is one passage which indicates what the hotel meant to some people:

"On coming to the lookout place on the eastern side of the Annie, George [Lord] pulled his horse up and gazed down. After the isolated life he had been used to on Erewhon, the scene below represented a stirring picture. Kuripapango was then the meeting place of the wool wagons from Napier and the pack trains from the Inland. The wool wagons and pack trains were in and there below, foregathering about the hotel and store, in that green Kuri-papango basin in the heart of the grim ranges were the packmen, wagoners, navvies of the road construction gangs, shearers, wool-scourers, shepherds, wild dog and pig hunters, and other out-back workers of those wild colonial times..."<sup>6</sup>

Lord had been intending to go as far as Willowford, but instead decided to stop at Kuripapango for the night.

There was a farm of some 500 acres attached to the hotel, which MacDonald ran in order to provide some of the food. Much of the farm was pasture but there were some crops. MacDonald indeed was reputed to distil whiskey for the hotel from his own rye.<sup>7</sup>

The farm was not only valuable to the hotel business. A traveller on the road once remarked:

"We again descend and come suddenly to a bit of well-grassed land, some hundreds of acres that has been drained by Mr MacDonald with very profitable results as the standing stacks of oats testify. The value of which is considerable, as the cost of carting from town to Kuripapango is four [pounds] per ton."<sup>8</sup>

MacDonald was able to supply fodder for the many horses and bullocks that passed through the area - for a fee, of course.

From 1893, two rival coach services ran through Kuripapango. The first was Rymer's Pioneer Coaches, run by George Rymer, and the second was MacDonald's Patea Coaches, run by the son of the hotel owner, Alex MacDonald Jnr. Both would leave Napier at 7.00 AM on Monday mornings, and would race for Kuripapango, bumping and swaying down the straits, the drivers whipping their horses mercilessly to retain first place.<sup>9</sup>

It was surprising that there were not more accidents than in fact occurred. One fatal accident took place on the Gentle Annie, when the king-bolt on one of Rymer's coaches broke, and the front half careered on up the hill while the rear rolled over into a cutting, losing the mails and killing one passenger.<sup>10</sup>

But the popularity of Kuripapango as a resort was short-lived. In the wet season when the Tutaekuri was in flood, the road was virtually impassable and coaches had to use the Tunanui-Okawa road, which was always in poor condition. Then on Good Friday 1897 came the great flood which washed away the bridge at Kuripapango. The tourist trade fell away dramatically, because although the hotel was on the Napier side of the bridge, the road between Napier-Hastings and Kuripapango had also been damaged by the floods and was far less easy to travel on than it had been. MacDonald's hotel continued to survive on the trade of those tourists that came and also that of the passing farmers, for some four years.

In 1901, the hotel burned down. It is not known how the fire started, but fortunately nobody was injured in the blaze. One of the stories that survives of the fire concerns a Mrs Ballantyne who:

"Realised, after the fire scare had been given, and she had got outside, that she had left her hat in an upstairs bedroom. Seeing that the

fire was still at the far end of the building and [that there was] ample time for her to do so, she rushed back and retrieved her hat. While doing so, however, she left the valuable wristlet watch her husband had given her [and] which she had in her hand, lying on the dressing table, and of course lost it."<sup>11</sup>

The guests, mostly in their nightclothes, were taken back to Napier in coaches. The fire did not however spell the end of MacDonald's business: for several months after the blaze he continued the bar trade in a converted stable. But finally he sold the licence to Mr Alex Knox, one of his coach drivers, and it was transferred to Waikare on the Napier-Wairoa road. MacDonald then turned his attentions to his farm.

#### NOTES

1. Kay Mooney A History of the County of Hawkes Bay  
Vol 3, p 28.
2. NZ Cyclopaedia Vol 6 p 419.
3. Mooney Vol 3 p 28.
4. Ibid p 31
5. Ibid
6. Lester Masters Tales of the Mails p 50.
7. NZFS File 13/0/3
8. Masters p 59.
9. Mooney Vol 3 p 28.
10. NZFS File 13/0/3
11. Masters p 69.

#### THE ROAD: A VITAL CONNECTION

The road connecting Kuripapango with the east coast is of considerable importance to the history of farming in the area. It was a major factor influencing the development at Kuripapango: the road provided the means not only by which supplies and tourists were brought

in, but also by which farm produce was brought out.

Probably the major problem encountered regarding the road was that, unlike other roading links, the Inland Patea Road was not considered very important, since the only users were the station owners at the end of it. During the 1880's it was thought that gold might be delivered in the area, which acted as a spur to the construction of a road, but unfortunately no precious metals were found.

From the viewpoint of the farmers the road had by 1880 become necessary to enable them to shift their wool clip out to the markets. Prior to this, it had been possible to move wool in a limited fashion down river by canoe, a means that had worked well until the local Maoris began to charge five and six pounds per canoe load.<sup>1</sup>

Dr M.D.N.Campbell has pointed out that:

"Inadequate roads, combined with the absence of mechanised transport, compelled inland sheepfarmers to rely on bullock or packhorse teams for their wool exports. Packhorse teams were preferred for work on narrow bush trails, among them the Inland Patea-Tunanui run and G.D. Hamilton's Mangatoro-Takapau run."<sup>2</sup>

During the 1860's and 1870's the road was little more than a packhorse trail.<sup>3</sup> This met the road at Maraekakaho and here the wool was transferred from the pack horses and taken to Napier.

Finance was simply not available to construct the road: the County Council did not have the money, and the central government in Wellington was not prepared to provide it. Ultimately some finance was produced, due in part to the thought of the road becoming a 'golden trail' into Napier. Yet despite even this, there was not at any time a major policy aimed at completing the Inland Patea road.



Active construction of the road began in 1880, and as described it reached Kuripapango in January 1881.<sup>4</sup>

"This, instead of Willowford, now became the meeting place for pack trains and bullock drays. When the wool clip was being brought out, three or four hundred pack horses could be seen in the paddocks adjoining the hotel, while inside packmen and bullockies washed the dust of the road out of their throats."<sup>5</sup>

The road was pushed on into the high country beyond Kuripapango despite a deterioration of the existing stretch during the wet season. By 1886 the road was within 20 miles (32 km) of Taihape but the County Council refused to extend it further, and then, when persuaded to do so, refused to build a bridge over the Rangitikei river. This was not in fact bridged until 1903, when the suspension bridge from Kuripapango was moved there.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this period, Kuripapango continued to be a major stopping point on the route from Inland Patea.

When the flood of 1897 mentioned in the previous section washed the bridge away, the wool clip was held up. Within a few months a narrow suspension bridge had been constructed but it was suitable only for foot traffic, and the wool had to be brought out bale by bale on pack horses.<sup>7</sup>

The rain associated with the floods threatened to further reduce communications: the Gentle Annie section of the road just beyond Kuripapango was found to be in danger of slipping away, and although for a time it was thought that relocation might provide a solution, it was reported in August 1897 after a survey that: "The locality is rocky and precipitous and it will be impossible to locate any road line not subject to periodic damage."<sup>8</sup>

Faced with massive damage to roads throughout the region, the County Council was not in a position to

immediately repair the bridge at Kuripapango. The suspension bridge was used for two seasons. In August 1898 a tender was accepted by John Griffin to build a new bridge, at a cost of 1,713 pounds with a 75 pound bonus if the bridge was finished by December 7th, in time for the beginning of the wool season. Delays, however, prevented the bridge from being completed before March 1899. The wool clip of some stations was held up for two years as a result.<sup>9</sup>

The new bridge remained at Kuripapango for sixty years, by the end of which it was in a very shaky condition indeed. The rabbit gate in the middle was removed so that truck drivers would not have to stop while crossing. A further difficulty was that the 6½ ton limit had for many years been inadequate.<sup>10</sup> The Hawkes Bay County Council was under pressure from the Rangitikei County Council to reduce the limit to a mere 2½ tons in view of the rickety nature of the bridge.<sup>11</sup>

Finally in 1959 the two County Councils and the National Roads Board agreed to erect a Bailey Bridge, this being accomplished in January 1961.<sup>12</sup>

It can be seen from this that for virtually the whole period under consideration, Kuripapango was being served by a bridge which was effectively a bottleneck. Sheep trucks often had to partially unload at Kuripapango in order to get across the bridge, driving the sheep over separately in mobs. Cutting of the bridge link would have effectively isolated the farms beyond from easy contact with the east coast and thus the bridge was the weak link in the chain.

As far as traffic over the road in general was concerned, the 20th century also saw changes with the introduction of the motor vehicle. In the earliest days this threatened to upset the situation with regard to road maintenance - already a sore point with the County Council - because wear and tear on the roads was multiplied many times by motor traffic. But the Main Highways Act of 1922 placed roads under national

control - this against the pleas of the Counties, who wished to retain control themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The days of the stage coach ended in 1918 when George Lord drove the last coach across the Inland Patea route.<sup>14</sup> He then closed his business at Willowford and re-established himself at Taihape.<sup>15</sup> Six years later he drove from Mangaohane to Taihape in what was the last journey ever made by stage coach over the Inland route.<sup>16</sup>

Bullock wagons continued to provide the main motive power for bringing out the wool clip until 1931, when William ('Bill') Pepper of Hastings began using a motor truck to take out 22 bales per load. His journeys into the area continued even outside the wool season with regular trips being made to take fertiliser, fuel and supplies to the stations. Up to five fourteen hour journeys a week were made, and Pepper's truck was a regular sight on the road through Kuripapango.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1940's motor transport had become the accepted norm, and such transport has continued to the present day. The road continues to hold a position of considerable importance as a major means of communication in the area.

#### NOTES

1. M.D.N.Campbell, "The Development of Landed Society in Hawkes Bay, 1860-1914." VUW PhD Thesis, Vol 1, p 188.
2. Ibid p 195
3. Mooney Vol 3 p 27, see also Napier Museum MSS, 1875 map.
4. Mooney p 28
5. Ibid p 29
6. Ibid p 30-31
7. Ibid p 33
8. Ibid
9. Ibid p 108
10. Ibid
11. Ibid p 109
12. Ibid
13. Ibid p 72-73
14. Ibid p 34
15. Masters p 152

16. Ibid p 162
17. Mooney Vol 3 p 54. It should be noted that Pepper also served other residents on the road, often taking small goods, packages and the like. The service car to Taihape also passed through, so the area was by no means as isolated as might be thought. Motor transport revolutionised road communication in the area.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE HARD LIFE

The largest farm at Kuripapango was owned and run by the Lumsden family. The property was purchased by David Lumsden in 1906, and after his death the farm was run jointly by his three sons as an estate: in 1950 they sold the land to the New Zealand Forest Service.

The property consisted essentially of the Kohinga block, but at various times included Ben Nevis, Cattle Hill and part of Omahaki. The latter was perhaps the best land, being clear in native grass, and before 1914 up to 80% lambing percentages were being recorded. After the First World War, however, this block reverted to fern and scrub.

Initially Lumsden also had a leasehold on the Manson block, which in the beginning was covered with lucern. This area was not however suitable for running stock during the winter and so after the lease expired it was not renewed.<sup>1</sup>

Life on the farm was not easy. The land was difficult to work and difficult to keep in production. Problems and hazards had to be faced that were not encountered by farmers on lower, more fertile land. Coupled with these problems were economic difficulties that made farming a continual uphill struggle. Wool sales alone did not provide enough to support the farm in some years, with the result that at times survival was possible only because the Lumsdens were able to grow their own food and supply virtually all their own needs. In one year during the Depression the farm was run on a total outlay of seventy pounds. It was in

this same period that a wool clip was sent to London - and the only return was a bill for ten pounds to cover expenses.<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.
2. Ibid.

#### FARMING CONDITIONS

The hills around Kuripapango were not prime farmland and indeed did not have the potential to become such land. Despite the slow improvement in agricultural technology during the first half of the twentieth century, farming at Kuripapango tended to become a struggle for survival, a struggle worsened by the poor economic climate of the time.

Local conditions had a great bearing on all aspects of farming in the area. The surrounding hill country was very rough, and difficult to run sheep through, and if left untended it also tended to grow manuka scrub rather than grass. The relatively poor quality of the soil also reduced stock carrying capacity by comparison with other, more fertile areas, and the very rugged nature of the hills made it difficult to spread fertiliser in any case. Often the cheapest and easiest means of fertilisation was to burn off the inedible scrub, allowing the potash to settle into the soil, and then to run sheep across the regrowth. Not until the 1950's did land such as that around Kuripapango become more readily workable, with the advent of aerial topdressing.<sup>1</sup>

Machinery on the Lumsden farm was virtually non-existent. In the very earliest days there was a reaper and binder which was used on occasion, but this soon fell into disrepair and was left to moulder away in a field. Because very little in the way of crops was grown, the machinery had only very limited use and it was not worth the considerable expense of upkeep.

One of the main problems was the wind. Although the Kuripapango valley looked sheltered, this was not in fact

the case. In one year the Lumsden's woolshed and shearers quarters were literally blown apart by howling gale-force winds that lifted the corrugated iron from the frame and sent it spinning off into the ground some distance away. Fortunately the frame itself was little damaged, so repairs were relatively straightforward.

The wind also made it difficult to plough, since it could tear the soil from a ploughed field and leave nothing behind except the bare clay and rock underlying it. This was unsuitable for growing anything and so a farmer who ploughed risked having his farm blown away. The Snellings ploughed part of the river flats in 1925, and were lucky not to lose their soil: the flats have not been ploughed since. Walter Ensor once ploughed part of the Blowhard, and lost a great deal of topsoil.<sup>2</sup>

Crops were thus very difficult to produce, and in fact the only crops regularly grown by the Lumsdens, apart from the vegetables in the house garden, were a few acres of hay to feed the house cows in winter: and even then it was necessary to supplement their feed with tree lucern.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the nature of the land, it was possible only to run sheep on it. During the late 19th century, experiments had gone on to determine the variety of sheep best suited to conditions in Hawkes Bay. Originally it had seemed that the Merino was ideal, but several major disadvantages in the type soon became manifest with the result that sheep farmers branched out into other varieties. Eventually the Romney was found to be most suitable.

Although not so well fitted to life on the rough country as the Merino, the Romney's wool was useful for a wide range of products, the meat was eminently saleable, and the pure Romney matured early and had a high lambing percentage, given the right conditions. Unlike some other breeds it also had an excellent constitution.<sup>4</sup>

Romneys were at first run in conjunction with Merinos in farms around the Kawekas, resulting in cross-breeds, but around the turn of the century most flocks had become pure Romney, and there was not a merino to be seen among them.<sup>5</sup>

Despite regular hunting since the mid 1870's, wild animals were a major problem to the sheep farmers. Wild dogs in particular worried sheep, injuring them and often causing many to be later shot. Some were killed outright by the dogs. Wild dogs were also something of a threat to men working on the runs.

Wild pigs were a problem in that they tended to root up the ground and destroy pasture. Deer were also prevalent during the early part of the century, and the Lumsdens would often go hunting, looking not only for a supply of meat but also to try and reduce the wild animal populations. This hunting and particularly the sound of gunfire was sometimes an annoyance to their neighbour, Rose MacDonald,<sup>6</sup> but it had to be done in order to try and maintain the viability of the farm. Reduction of the wild animal menace meant one less factor to worry about.

Another hurdle to be overcome was losses due to sheep disease. In the early part of the twentieth century, treatment of various diseases and parasitic infections was relatively primitive. Fortunately scab had never been a major problem in the Kaweka region, and nor had lungworm. Footrot, however, was a continually present menace.

The disease was caused by micro-organisms entering cracks or breaks in the skin between the claws, causing the sole to separate from the underlying tissue. It was less prevalent during the hot summer months, but during the winter or in wet conditions it could devastate a flock.

Control was difficult. Attempted cures included running the sheep through a disinfectant solution of arsenic or bluestone, or keeping them for several days in a limestone covered yard.<sup>7</sup> Neither remedy was



particularly successful. When released into the hills, sheep could often go untreated for weeks, with the result that they could become lame in a whole foot.

Often, on the poor land, the wool clip was not as good as it could have been: but the main difficulty was that the scrub tended to pull out the best of the wool in any case. Sheep would also arrive to be sheared with their wool clogged with biddy-bids. These made it impossible to shear them since the wool around the neck, where the shearer had to start, could not be parted to allow the clippers in.

Once sheared, the wool was baled and then sent down the road to Napier, as described earlier. Usually it was sold locally, because a quick return was often desirable. Some of the larger station owners - such as those further up the road - would sell to the London market.<sup>8</sup>

The first wool sales had taken place around 1869-70 in Napier, but it was not until the 1890's that the Napier market began to grow. In November 1892 the first Williams and Kettle wool sale took place. By the 1897-1902 period some 2,923 bales per year were being sold in Napier through Williams and Kettle, and this had increased to an average of 6,728 per annum by 1907-12.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the difficulty of making a living out of the land, the Lumsdens never hired any labour to help on the farm: they simply could not afford to. All the work was done by themselves. This made some of the largest jobs such as clearing scrub into gargantuan tasks, and indeed there was little time to spare for this job, so that the scrub gradually became worse and worse as time went on.

In 1935 the Lumsdens paid to have it properly cleared, but it began growing back again and by 1950 was as bad as it had ever been.<sup>10</sup>

These then were the kind of conditions under which the Lumsdens farmed at Kuripapango. Farming was a continual uphill struggle made worse by the kind of land, and by the innumerable factors which threatened to cut down productivity to the point where there was insufficient

return for the station to cope with the purchase of goods that could not be produced on the farm, such as petrol, oil, fencing wire, tea, sugar and flour.<sup>11</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Campbell, Vol 1 p 166
5. R.Bell, pers. comm.
6. D.Neill, pers. comm.
7. Campbell Vol 1 p 142
8. Ibid p 199-200
9. Ibid p 200
10. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.
11. Ibid

#### LIFE ON THE FARM

Life on the Lumsden farm was hard, but it was enjoyable and while the going often became very difficult, the Lumsdens knew that as long as they had vegetables in the garden, and there were wild pig, deer and sheep to shoot, they would not starve.

Perhaps because of this they were always hospitable to passing swaggers, who they knew were worse off by far. The number of swaggers increased towards the end of the 1920's with the onset of the Depression, and they came through Kuripapango regularly, on their way to find work at the stations further up the road. Rose MacDonald would not have anything to do with them, and so they would always go to the Lumsdens house. Ian Lumsden recalls one evening when ten swaggers sat down at the meal table - in addition to himself and his brothers.

Swaggers were always accommodated in the shearers quarters - which were not used for any other purpose - or, if these were already full, in the open verandah. They would always be fed, and because the garden grew fairly well there was always enough to feed them with.

Farm management as such was relatively limited since

there was not a great deal that could be done. The labour was not available to do more than simply release the sheep on to the land, and then muster them in when the time came for shearing and dipping. The land was fertilised through repeated burnoffs, but it was realised even then that this was essentially a one-way process, and that eventually the last of the growth potential would be gone.<sup>1</sup>

The same basic routine was followed year by year, with little to mark one year off from the next. There is no surviving documentation to give stock numbers and movements, wool clips, or farm finances. What remains is in the memories of those that lived on the farm, and from this it is possible to produce a general picture of what life was like, and, to some degree, the style of farming.

Originally, Merinos were run on the Manson and Mt Cameron block, but this area had to be dropped as the snow-losses during the winter were too high, even among the hardy merino breeds. The area was effectively a two-day muster from the farmhouse, and it was often not possible to rescue snow-bound sheep in time. By the 1930's the main breed being run was the Romney Wether, which had been found to be the best variety fitted to local conditions.

Carrying capacity of the whole farm averaged about two sheep per acre. This was not sufficient for the sheep to be able to eat down the scrub regrowth, or inhibit it by trampling. Manuka scrub began to affect the farm from the early 1920's onwards. When David Lumsden moved in around 1906, the land had been completely clear, having had the native bush burned off it, but as the years went by the scrub continued to encroach and this not only cut down the grassed areas but also damaged the sheep's wool, as discussed earlier.

Around World War One, it had been possible to get in three or four musters a year, but this number fell in later years, following a reduction in productivity due to a deterioration of the land. The area farmed was quite extensive: with what Lumsden owned and leased

there were about 70,000 acres all told at that time, and the blocks were in better order than at any later date.

When in 1935 the three Lumsden brothers were able to afford to hire labour and have the land cleared of all scrub, farming began to become profitable. The country was by then recovering from the Depression and wool prices were improving. By 1936-37 it was even possible to fence the property.

The farm was at its best during the late 1930's, but with the outbreak of World War Two it began to deteriorate again: the scrub came back and grass regrowth was not as good as it had been.

During the lean times of the 1920's and early 1930's the Lumsdens had been forced to make all kinds of innovations in order to obtain sufficient money to run the farm. As mentioned, they tried to make themselves as self-sufficient as possible - running the entire farm on an outlay of only seventy pounds one year. Another year, some sixteen cows were milked by hand, and the cream was separated. This was sent into town on the service car. It was possible to get two shillings and sixpence for each can of cream, but as the service car charged two shillings to take it into town, the profitability of this avenue was severely eroded.

The only land ploughed for cropping was between the Turntable and the Willows, below the road by what was then known as Swamp Creek. Here oats were grown to make chaff to feed the house cows and the few horses. As described it was a risky business because the wind often threatened to blow away the topsoil. The amount grown was also sometimes insufficient to last through the winter, and had to be supplemented with tree lucern.

Wild animals remained a problem throughout the period. Rabbits in particular became a menace and by the end of the 1940's the Lumsdens were using Strychnine to try and keep them down. The rabbits thrived on the short grass left by sheep, with the result that it did

not regrow and carrying capacity was markedly reduced. It was essential to keep the rabbit population down in order to retain even minimal carrying capacity: this was at a time when scrub was again spreading over the land.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the period the condition of the road was a major worry, because without it none of the farm produce could get through. During the 1930's, partly to ensure that the road remained in good condition, and also to earn additional money, the Lumsdens would work for the County Council filling in potholes. They had an old Ford truck which they used for metalling, and which they hired out to the County Council at twelve shillings and sixpence a day.<sup>3</sup>

Deer hunting also provided some income: the pelts were eminently saleable, and until the later 1940's deer were quite common in the area. The meat was also useful on the farm, being a change from mutton, rabbit and pork.

#### NOTES

1. I. Lumsden, pers. comm.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

#### FENCING

Fencing at Kuripapango was an arduous task because of the difficulty of moving the necessary material into the area. Finance was also a major stumbling block that for many years prevented the Lumsdens from erecting fences. The land had been ring-fenced in 1908, but from then until 1936 it remained essentially a single block, through which the sheep roamed, inhibited from moving only by areas of scrub through which they were unable to force a passage.

By 1936, however, the economic situation had improved to the point where, as mentioned, it was possible to hire labour to cut down the scrub. As part of the general improvements the Lumsdens also began a major program of fencing: this was intended to divide the land up into large sections, and the three brothers did most of the

work themselves. Some 8 or 9 miles (13-15 km) of fencing was constructed.

The task was both difficult and lengthy. All the material required had to be packed in on horseback, a slow process. In some places, concrete posts were used. These were made on the property in a mould dug near the river. The posts were reinforced and also contained bolts so that wire could be strung on them. They were moved by hand from the river bank to their position on the farm - not an easy task since they weighed more than 80 pounds and were awkward to carry. Once in position however they produced a very strong and solid fence.

Shortly after the fencing had been completed, in 1938, a major flood occurred and about half a mile of one fence was washed out. This was soon replaced, except for one section that crossed a slip. This slip continued to move periodically and each time it did so the fence was torn out. The Lumsdens solved the problem by simply stringing wires right across the slip, from posts on each side, using wire to act as uprights across the span. This was more flexible than a fence constructed with solid posts, and it was also relatively easy and rapid to replace these uprights when they were torn out by some movement of the slope.<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.

#### THE FARM BUILDINGS

The house in which the Lumsden family lived at Kuripapango, now known as Robson Lodge, was built in 1908 from timber that had been brought in by pack horse. It was perhaps typical of many New Zealand farm houses in that it continued to grow after the initial structure had been completed. In 1924 the kitchen and bathroom were added as a lean-to section at the back. There was also an open porch at the front, used as a bedroom even during the winter. Ian Lumsden recalls lying in bed

and watching the snow fall only a few feet away. The porch was demolished after the farm was sold in 1950.

It was a very sturdily built house and despite the frequent minor earthquakes in the region, remained undamaged until February 1931, when the Napier earthquake shook Hawkes Bay. It was felt with sufficient force at Kuripapango to knock down the kitchen chimney. The brick work fell away from the house and did no damage: but the flue was blocked and a fire was burning in the stove beneath which promptly spread into the kitchen.

The house would have burned down had Mrs Lumsden and her daughter, who were in the kitchen at the time, not climbed on to the roof and tipped a 100 gallon water tank which was standing next to the ruined chimney, into the hole. The fire was thus extinguished and a possible catastrophe averted.<sup>1</sup>

The house was never luxuriously furnished inside, but it was comfortable, and livable, and in the harsh economic climate of the period this was all that could be asked for.

After the farm had been sold to the Forest Service, the house was used by the Forest Ranger stationed in the area, Morrie Robson. He continued to live there until shortly before his death. The house was not, however, re-occupied: subsequent Forest Rangers lived in a building constructed further down on the flats in the early 1960's.

The Lumsden house continued to be maintained, however, and in the 1970's was opened for use as a base for school camps and trips by groups and clubs interested in the area, such as the Forest and Bird Society. In 1978 the house was given the name Robson Lodge, to commemorate the life and work of Morrie Robson. Today the house is still used in this role.

When the Lumsdens owned the farm, a large shearing shed and also shearers quarters were situated not far from the house. The shearing shed was a large, corrugated iron clad building: as described earlier it was once blown down by the wind, but it was an essential part of the farm and after

repairs remained standing until the farm was sold. The Forest Service subsequently pulled it down and used the materials to build huts.

Scattered around the farm were a few small huts which were used on occasion when the Lumsdens were out late at night on the back of the property, and unable to return to the house.<sup>2</sup>

Constructing buildings on the farm presented a special problem because the materials were not easily transportable. The road was not always in good condition, and the expense of transporting the materials even when it was, often made it uneconomic to construct new buildings. Consequently anything built tended to remain in use for many years beyond what might, by modern standards, be considered its useful life.<sup>3</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

#### TRESPASSERS AND POACHERS

One menace which had to be constantly countered was that of poachers. Unscrupulous hunters would enter the property of those in the area as if it was their own, and often if they were unable to get any deer, they would kill a few sheep on their way out and leave the bodies. On one occasion, Walter Ensor arrived at a clearing to discover the bodies of fifty dead Romneys lying there.

To police the boundaries was almost impossible. At one stage the Lumsdens erected a "Trespassers Will be Prosecuted" sign, but this served merely as a target for the hunters. Whenever they saw a poacher, the Lumsdens would chase him off the property: generally the Lumsden brothers were stronger and faster than the casual hunters who trespassed, due to working on the land, and poachers so dealt with usually did not come back.

At times the poachers could be quite arrogant. One incident occurred in a hut on top of Bonnie Mary (now known



as Kohinga). Dave Lumsden - the son of the original owner - had been working at the back of the property, and arrived at the hut late at night in the rain.

He had hardly dried himself off and settled down for the night before somebody fumbled at the door, and two men -a father and son - walked in. Both had packs and guns and were clearly intending to move in and try their luck at hunting.

"What are you doing here ?" asked the older man.

"Why ?" demanded Lumsden.

"We own this place," replied the other "You'll have to leave."

"I happen to be one of the owners myself," said Lumsden "Now get out."

The younger poacher moved towards Lumsden in a threatening manner, and the latter, despite the odds being against him, lashed out at the poacher with such force that the latter was stunned. A nasty situation was thus averted, and Lumsden promptly marched them both off the property - despite the rain and the dark.

This was the kind of incident that was all too common. There were no police at Kuripapango and the farmers there often had to act in order to protect themselves. However, there were no serious incidents during the period: nobody was ever killed at Kuripapango.<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTES

1. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE MACDONALD PROPERTY

One of the best known figures at Kuripapango was Rose MacDonald, who owned property to the north of Kuripapango, as far as the Lakes. This land is now part of the Kaweka State Forest, having been acquired in early 1982.

It has been suggested that Rose ran a successful farm on the property for many years, following in the footsteps of her father and grandfather, but in fact this is not the case. Rather, she preferred to live a life of leisure, running a few sheep and several cows on a property that became increasingly overgrown with fern and scrub as the years went by.

A number of seemingly contradictory impressions of Rose MacDonald survive today. Some saw her as a hard, ungenerous woman who turned away those asking for help. Others found her warm, charming and generous. Uncovering the true character of Rose MacDonald poses some interesting problems, but as will be seen, it is clear that the nature of her character represented one of the several reasons why the land was not farmed.

THE CHARACTER OF ROSE MACDONALD

Rose MacDonald was without doubt one of the 'characters' of the region. She was in fact a second generation New Zealander, her grandfather Alexander MacDonald, a Glaswegian, having established the hotel.

Rose herself was born on T<sub>1</sub> Mahunga station at Pohokura in the late 1890's. The exact date is unknown: she never

spoke of her age. She arrived to live in Kuripapango around 1927, after the Snellings left, and her mother lived with her for many years. Her father died around 1930.<sup>1</sup>

It is in some ways difficult to determine what kind of person Rose MacDonald was, because not only is existing information largely fragmentary, but different people gained different impressions of her, to the extent that reports of her character and actions are in some cases contradictory.

To simply list the known facts would be unproductive because no conclusion could then be drawn from them. As an example, some remember Rose as being very kind, warm-hearted, generous, popular in the area, and welcoming visitors with open arms. But others recall that she turned visitors away, and that she was little liked by her neighbours.

Which is correct ? One could debate endlessly: but it would be impossible to select between the two since there are no alternative sources for corroborating evidence to support one view or the other.

The solution to this problem is to be found in the fact that Rose had been brought up in a family of entrepreneurs, who had run the hotel, the coaching business, the local store - and who owned shares in other businesses, such as the Napier Tobacco Company - in an area where the average inhabitant was a farmer struggling to make a living from poor quality land.

Rose's parents, although not exceptionally wealthy, nonetheless had sufficient means to ensure that their daughter wanted for nothing. She would travel in to Napier, for instance, to attend a private music tutor, or to go to parties. It seems that she did not like her music lessons, but the fact that she had them is nevertheless an indication of the relative comfort in which she was brought up.

In view of this upbringing it is clear that what was instilled in Rose from an early age was a sense of 'social values' and 'social position'. Her actions at Kuripapango can be more easily interpreted, and the contradictions reconciled, in terms of this understanding,

and hence it must be borne in mind throughout the following section.

This interpretation explains why her neighbours sometimes gained the impression that Rose wished to be thought of as being wealthier and more influential than she actually was. One group of swaggers, in the early 1930's, asking for food at Rose's house, were sent across the valley to the Lumsdens, and told that the Lumsdens were merely workers on Rose's farm.

At another stage, she owned a Straight Eight Buick, a particularly impressive motor car of the time, so she would park it outside her house to show passers-by. She also drove this car along the side of the road, so that the wheels tracked on the grass verge and centreline, in order to save the tyres.<sup>2</sup>

Her neighbours felt that she was at times trying to increase her own standing at the expense of others: but in fact it is clear that what Rose was doing was demonstrating, possibly for her own satisfaction rather than that of anybody else, a form of social stratification. She had been brought up to believe that she was somehow 'higher up' the social scale than others in the district, and since the back country farming life was very much a 'leveller' in terms of social divisions, she had to demonstrate in some manner that she was 'better'.

This reflected through into her associations with people. It is clear from the evidence that she preferred to associate with 'proper' people. Swaggers were always turned away from her door and sent to the neighbours, but she welcomed the company of more 'respectable' people, such as a Hastings doctor and a chiropractor, for instance, who were both frequent visitors.<sup>3</sup>

To those that she liked, Rose was indeed kind, warm and generous, but those that she disliked, or who did not reach her standards of acceptability, received short shrift. In particular she could not stand hunters trespassing on her property, which

they did often because they strayed off the public right of way to the Lakes, which crossed Rose's property at the time.<sup>4</sup> She evidently also resented, later on, Morrie Robson crossing her land with pig dogs, which tended to disturb her sheep if they saw a pig and chased it.<sup>5</sup>

The implication should not, however, be taken from this that there was strict division in Rose's attitude to people. The reality of the matter was of far greater complexity, and here again surface what seem at first to be contradictions. Rose would happily associate with, for instance, work-gangs repairing the road. When the sheep needed shearing, the Lumsdens would often help despite the odd incidents that tended to occur regarding swaggers.

The point that must also be considered in these instances, however, is that neither the work gangs nor the Lumsdens assumed a position whereby they might be considered on an 'equal' basis with Rose. They were not visitors as such, and nor could they be considered friends: the contact was strictly casual and in this context the social division that Rose had created could be maintained.

It is thus possible to again perceive the underlying social perspective that in general guided Rose MacDonald's actions, in particular those regarding the people with whom she associated, even in events which at first glance seem to be contradictory.

Rose was comfortably well off: her main income was not from the land, but dividends from shares purchased by her father in the Napier Tobacco Company (this later became Rothmans). As she explained to Pat Ensor, she lived in Kuripapango because she liked it, and she did not need to do much in the way of farming. Indeed, the condition of the land was such that it would have been difficult to make a living from it in any case.<sup>6</sup>

Living at Kuripapango in this manner fitted Rose's social perspectives, since she had an adequate

unearned income, and it was not the 'proper' thing for a landowner to work the property directly. Indeed, the work that was necessary on her land was done by Jack Featherston, her 'farm labour'. As will be seen in the next section, her treatment of him is explicable in terms of his position on the farm.

Rose MacDonald's personality was clearly multi-faceted, but also clearly very strong. She was the kind of individual who, once her mind had been made up, did not change it: and she had her likes and dislikes firmly in her mind. Those who got on the wrong side of her were lucky to escape without knowing it.

She was also a very capable woman, being able to do most of the jobs around the farm - although by the same token, if she could get Jack to do the job, then she would not do it herself. She gave the distinct impression to some that she could turn her hand to anything.<sup>7</sup>

All those who remember Rose agree on several major points. She was a very 'outdoors' individual, and would spend many hours outside riding a horse. She was also a crack shot, being able to fire accurately even from horseback.<sup>8</sup> She remained very fit even in her old age.<sup>9</sup>

One side of her personality is remembered vividly by Mrs Ann Edmond, who with her husband and daughter, stayed with Rose for some time during 1948.

The three Edmonds - John, Ann and Jill, had moved into Kuripapango to escape a polio epidemic which they feared might affect Jill, who was only five at the time and in the agegroup thought most susceptible to the illness. They remembered stories of Kuripapango as a health resort and so moved up into the mountains.

When Rose found that they intended to camp at first in a tent, having no other accomodation immediately available, she invited them in to stay. They in fact remained at Kuripapango for some months, and in later years returned periodically for several weeks at a time.<sup>10</sup>

Mrs Edmond found Rose a very charming and hospitable host who did all she could to make them comfortable. Mrs Edmond was not allowed to help with the housekeeping, and although her husband did work in the garden on occasion, she was herself very much at leisure. She and her family had a very pleasant time at Kuripapango.

Again the attitude that Rose took towards the Edmonds can be seen in terms of her social perspective. Mrs Edmond had herself been brought up in a house where servants were employed, and had gone to Woodford, the Havelock North boarding school, for instance. She was of a type 'acceptable' to Rose.

A number of stories have survived that illustrate various additional aspects of Rose MacDonald's personality, and it is worth recounting them here.

On one occasion when Mrs Edmond was staying at Kuripapango, she was invited to go riding with Rose. The horse she had was, according to Rose, owned by a Hastings chiropractor who occasionally visited, and the horse had suffered a fit only the day before. Mrs Edmond, who had not ridden to any great degree previously, was quite nervous as they set off up the Gentle Annie. They turned north, and almost at once Rose was out of sight through thick scrub and foliage. Mrs Edmond let the horse move on a little and then called out: "Where are you?". Rose replied at once from some distance away: "Stay where you are!". The tone was commanding and so Mrs Edmond waited. A few moments later Rose appeared and it transpired that Mrs Edmond had stopped just short of a nasty and almost sheer drop, which was hidden because of the thick foliage. Rose, who knew the country like the back of her hand, had realised from the position of her voice where Mrs Edmond had got to.<sup>11</sup>

Like many New Zealanders of her generation, Rose had suffered from severe dental caries, with the result that by the 1940's she had lost all her teeth and had two sets of dentures, one for the top and one for the bottom. However, she never wore the bottom set: she

would go into town with them in her handbag and yet would not put them on.<sup>12</sup>

She had considerable concern about her own safety at Kuripapango. As has already been discussed, it was a fairly lawless area in many respects: and Rose, living alone with her elderly mother, felt particularly vulnerable. Consequently she would sleep with a gun in the bed, with the intention of using it against any intruders.<sup>13</sup> This habit in fact continued long after she had left Kuripapango, even until the last years of her life.<sup>14</sup>

On one occasion she 'put the wind up' a local farmer, who had agreed to help her muster some sheep off Bonnie Mary. She concluded the arrangement by saying: "It'll be just you and me alone, Des." The farmer read into this an implication somewhat different to that which had probably been intended, and had a very uneasy day mustering the hills. His fears did not however eventuate.<sup>15</sup>

Rose continued to live at Kuripapango for many years. Her mother, Emily MacDonald, died during the 1950's; and her loss was sorely felt by those in the area. Rose continued to live in the house and to follow the lifestyle to which she had become accustomed, but eventually she became too old herself to continue living in the relative isolation of Kuripapango.

In 1965, Rose moved to Korokipo, where she had a small section. But she still thought of Kuripapango as 'home', and even purchased a ten acre block on the Blowhard so that she could visit the area and be able to walk on the land without being thrown off.

By 1978, however, she was unable even to look after the property at Korokipo, and moved instead to Braemar in Havelock North, where she remained for a while before finally moving to the Atawhai nursing home in Taradale, where she spent her last years. She died in 1982.<sup>16</sup> Only half a dozen people attended her funeral: she had very little family -



the only survivors being two brothers in Auckland - and few of her friends remained.<sup>17</sup> Thus passed one of the best known 'characters' of Kuripapango.

#### NOTES

1. I. Lumsden, pers. comm.
2. Ibid
3. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
4. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
5. D.Neill, pers. comm.
6. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
7. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
8. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
9. Mrs Burson, pers. comm.
10. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. Ibid
14. Mrs Burson, pers. comm.
15. D.Neill, pers. comm.
16. Mrs Burson, pers. comm.
17. D.Neill, pers. comm.

#### JACK FEATHERSTON

Known to many just as 'Kuripapango Jack', Jack Featherston was Rose MacDonald's farm help. He arrived one day in the early 1930's intending to stay 'Just a night', and remained there until Rose left the district in the mid 1960's. He went with her and died shortly afterwards at Korokipo. Nobody knew exactly how old Jack was, although even in 1948 it was observed that he was quite elderly.<sup>1</sup>

His life was not an easy one, because Rose left him in no doubt as to who was in charge. In fact, Jack was not paid for his work, but received housing and food of a kind, and occasionally a supply of tobacco. In all probability he stayed because he felt that with Rose he was assured of his keep, which might not necessarily have

been the case had he gone elsewhere. But at the same time the conditions under which he lived can hardly be called comfortable.

Again, his treatment can be explained in terms of the attitude that Rose took towards social divisions. Jack was the 'farm labour' and had to be reminded of this. There is no evidence that at any time he was treated as a friend or as a guest. Why Rose allowed him to stay, in view of her known dislike of swaggers, is not known: but possibly she may have been requiring help on the farm at the time that Jack appeared. It is also possible that Emily MacDonald, who was known to be of a kindly disposition to those of less good fortune, had some influence on the decision to let Jack stay.

In physical appearance Jack was fairly unkempt. He was not a tall man, but he was quite strong, and would do all kinds of tasks that seemed 'bigger' than he was, without much difficulty.<sup>2</sup> His ragged visage was due partly to the fact that he would cut his own hair by pulling a lock away from the rest and shearing it off short with a butcher's knife. His beard was trimmed in the same way.<sup>3</sup> He did not appear to care too greatly about the frequency of his baths, and tended also to remain in the same clothes for lengthy periods of time.

This led to an amusing incident in 1948, when the Edmond family were staying with Rose. Their young daughter, Jill Edmond, who was about five at the time, told Jack: "You're dirty." The next day he was hardly recognizable: he had scrubbed himself in the river and appeared also to have washed his clothes in the same place.<sup>4</sup>

Local residents recall that he did not live in the house itself, but rather in a shack near the river. This was made of corrugated iron and it was unlined. How he survived in this hut during the winter is not known, and indeed many people in the area were surprised that, in later years, he did not seem to be badly affected by the winter cold.<sup>5</sup>

The hut was roughly furnished inside with a 'bed' which consisted of a mattress on which there were what appeared to be a pile of rags: they were actually blankets and Jack would roll himself up in these at night, and in the morning would unroll himself, leaving them in a heap on the mattress.

Although his food was provided, he was not allowed to eat in the house, except on special occasions and even then he was restricted to the pantry.<sup>6</sup> On most evenings he had to cook and eat his food outdoors, and he would often be seen sitting outside his hut, cooking over an open fire: he did this even in the rain on occasion.<sup>7</sup>

Jack used to come into town at times with Rose, but he always had to sit in the back seat of the car, while Rose's dog took the front. Sometimes Rose would give Jack enough money to buy a bar of chocolate: but she did not eat chocolate herself and so Jack was often seen sharing it with the dog.<sup>8</sup>

He led a very menial existence, but the work for his keep was often very hard. On one occasion, Ian Lumsden was walking down the Napier-Taihape road when he came across Jack pushing an iron wheelbarrow across the rough shingle. When asked what he was doing, Jack replied that he had just taken three bales of hay up the road - a distance of several miles - to feed Rose's cattle which she was keeping in a distant paddock.<sup>9</sup>

Jack was the general labourer on the land and, indeed, did most of the work. One of his less pleasant tasks was emptying the latrine. Sanitary facilities at Kuripapango were of course limited to septic tanks and similar devices. The MacDonalds had a tank that required emptying at intervals, and Jack would take it to the Ngaruroro and tip it in. Occasionally when he was doing so, there would be fishermen downstream, and they would always know what had happened.<sup>10</sup>

Jack's days were long and hard: he had to ensure that the farm animals - relatively few in

number though they were - were fed in the winter: he had to muster them: help shear them: dig the house garden: weed the flower garden: repair fences: and so on. There was more than enough work on the property for one man.

But there were occasional respites from his work, and Jack sometimes entertained visitors in the evenings. He was well known in the district and those visiting would often call in to yarn with him: there were few indeed that regularly hunted or tramped in the area who had not heard of 'Old Jack'. He in fact featured in a poem written by Lester Masters, entitled 'Wandering George':

"Come back to Kuripapango boy,  
And listen to Old Jack tell  
Of mighty trouts where the river bends  
And the boars he's sent to L

Which range the cullers are onto next,  
What rifles they have and gear,  
And note some muggins left on a gate  
On the way to Ngamatea.

The kinds of deers in the ranges now:  
Of how he cornered a fawn,  
Of ducks that came with the autumn rain,  
And tui that calls with the dawn.

The new track over the Don Juan  
That Morrie and they have cut:  
And way the trampers have re-arranged  
The old Kaweka hut.

Come back to Kuripapango boy,  
Hear stags with a rippling roar,  
And cheery welcome awaiting you  
At Kuripapango door."<sup>11</sup>

#### NOTES

1. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
2. D.Neill, pers. comm.
3. I. Lumsden, pers. comm.

4. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
5. D.Neill, pers. comm.
6. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
7. I. Lumsden, pers. comm.
8. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
9. I. Lumsden, pers. comm.
10. D. Neill, pers. comm.
11. NZFS File 13/0/3.

#### THE MACDONALD HOUSE

To the passer-by, the house in which Rose MacDonald and her mother lived appeared as a long, gabled, red-roofed structure set amid a garden that contained a number of tall trees and which, in the summer months, was a riot of colour.

The structure had been built in 1902 following the hotel fire, by the simple procedure of moving the six remaining out-buildings into one place. The resulting house was very long and narrow, with six doors along the front, another at the back, and one at the side. Although the buildings were linked to form a single structure, their separate origins remained evident. Inter-connecting doors were cut through the walls between the sections, but it was also possible to go from one room to another through the exterior doors.

Originally the rooms had been levelled so as to be in line with one another, but as the years went by they tended to sag, so that if one was looking, for instance, from the kitchen through the pantry to the living room, a distinct twist was visible.

A considerable amount of work had been done to improve the original condition of the buildings: they were lined, two fireplaces were installed, wallpaper was hung, and curtains were put up. When completed the house was quite comfortable to live in, and it was well furnished. All that remained of the old hotel were two large concrete slabs, one of which contained the original brick oven that had formed an integral part of the hotel

kitchen. Lying to the northeast of the MacDonald house, and separated from it by perhaps twenty feet in the case of the nearer one, the slabs remain there to the present day, as is evident from the photographs on the following page: the dark structure to the right of the house in the top photograph is the slab containing the oven.

The southernmost building had been subdivided into a kitchen and a bathroom. The kitchen was perhaps the most used room in the building, like a farm kitchen in many respects with a large table, wood-stove, bench, and a ceramic sink. There were cupboards in which the crockery was kept, and an exterior door which gave access to a concreted area on the edge of which the wash-house had been built as a lean-to against the main structure of the building.

Off the kitchen was a pantry, again part of a sub-divided out-building: the second room in this section was a bedroom. The pantry was where, on the rare occasions that he was allowed to eat inside, Jack Featherston was given his food.

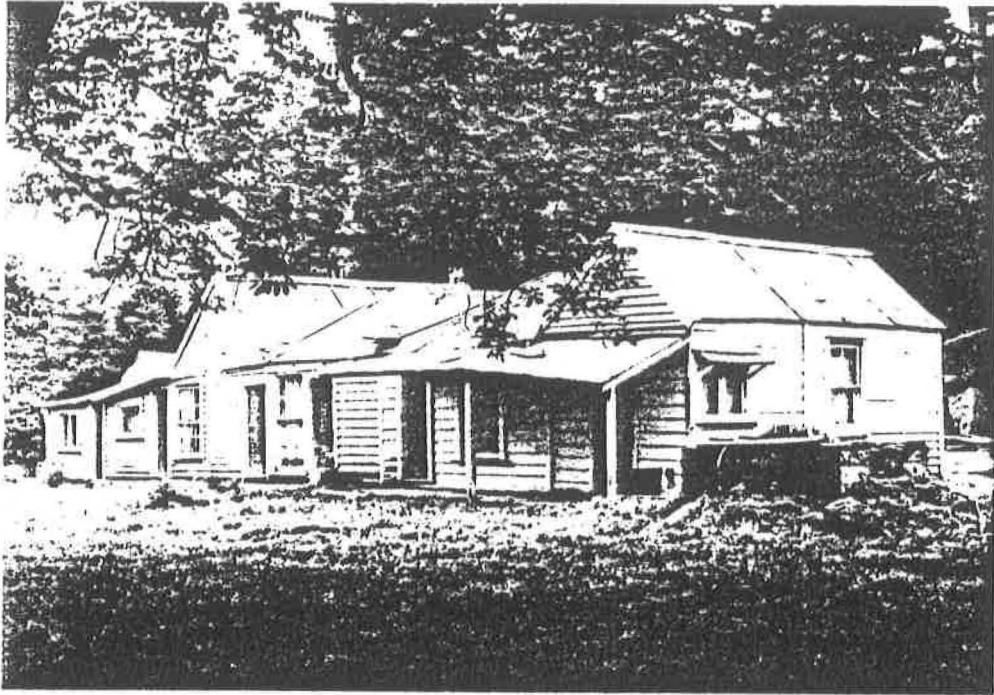
Beyond this the third building had been turned into a large sitting room: this was evidently not used to any great extent.

The fourth and fifth out-buildings were of different design, having a much lower stud and being of squarer plan. They were evidently used as living rooms or bedrooms at different times. One was fitted with a floor-to-ceiling window next to the exterior door: this window was one of the few pieces of the hotel itself to survive the blaze. Finally, at the northernmost end of the house, was a large bedroom, again with a high ceiling and gabled roof.

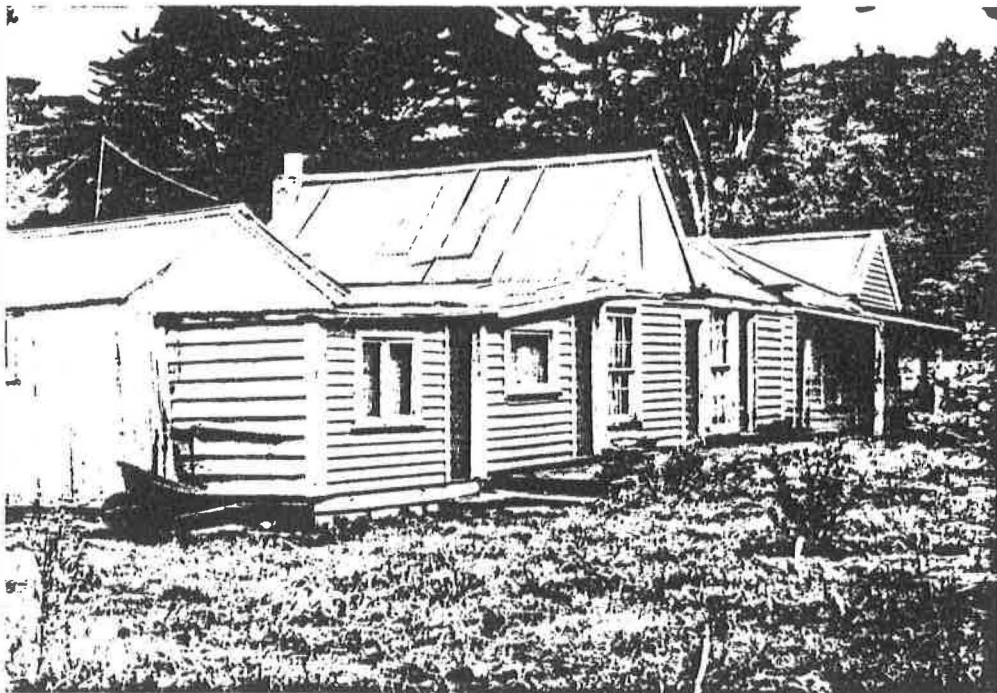
The house remained a comfortable dwelling for many years. Some difficulty was experienced in rendering it vermin-proof: one guest who stayed in 1948 was quite troubled by the rats that ran through the bedrooms at night.<sup>1</sup> During the same period the bath became unusable because of a hole that developed in the main water tank, which could

PLATE ONE

THE MACDONALD HOUSE



The northeast corner of the house, showing the decaying balcony and also, in the foreground on the right, one of the concrete slabs. (Photo: S. Aldrich, NZFS)



The southeast corner, showing the kitchen and attached corrugated iron wash-house. Note the rough, paddock-like state of the surrounds: at the time that both photographs were taken, in early February 1984, the house had been unoccupied for some time, and the grounds had effectively been untended for twenty years. (Photo: S. Aldrich, NZFS)

not be repaired.

This was not however the problem it might have been because a small stream flowed past the southern end of the house and was used not only for washing but also to supply household water. Most of the drinking water had to be boiled, but there was also a small fresh water spring under the garden hedge which provided clean water.

Because there was no electricity, a refrigerator was never purchased, so meat was kept outside in a safe. The grille on the door of this safe was always black with blowflies trying to get in during the summer months: evidently they usually failed, as the meat was seldom maggot-ridden.<sup>2</sup>

Rose MacDonald did much of the necessary maintenance on the house itself, but towards the end of her time at Kuripapango the roof was leaking quite badly in a number of places.<sup>3</sup>

The house was surrounded by trees, some of which had been planted before the hotel burned down: others were planted later and were growing on the hotel site itself. A garden was maintained south of the house: of this, Nola MacAulay wrote in 1966:

"The trees surrounding the house are very old - the macrocapas and pines being there for more than 60 years. The walnut tree in the garden is so tall that one has to stand well back to see the top of it, and the honeysuckle and violets make this old-world garden a joy to walk around. There is a small stream near the house and over this I discovered a kitchen garden with delicious red, black and even white currants. The latter intrigued me and I found them very sweet to taste."<sup>4</sup>

The garden grew both flowers and vegetables, and supplied much of the food. Jack Featherston worked on it whenever necessary. It was possible to sit beneath the trees in the shade around the garden during the hot summer



months.<sup>5</sup> Today the garden is gone and the stream has dried up: only the trees are left, shading a flat grassy expanse which is all that remains of the kitchen garden.

There were no other buildings on the property apart from the shed in which Jack Featherston lived, and the stables across the road. After Rose left Kuripapango in 1965 the house was locked up: but it was later used as shearers quarters. John MacRae, who purchased the property, also stayed there on occasion. The house was thus intermittently occupied until the surrounding farm was sold to the Forest Service, in early 1982. Since then the house has remained empty. Its condition has deteriorated somewhat but it was still generally intact and in relatively sound condition as late as 1984.<sup>6</sup>

#### NOTES

1. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
2. Ibid
3. I. Lumsden, pers. comm.
4. Nola MacAulay, The Road to the West p 17.
5. A.Edmond, pers. comm.
6. Result of investigations during field trip by the author.

#### ROSE MACDONALD'S FARM

It is commonly believed that Rose MacDonald ran a successful farm on her property during the years she lived at Kuripapango. However, research indicates that this is something of a misconception: there was enough in the way of farming activities for it to appear on a casual glance that the area was being farmed, but in fact it was not.

In the 1890's, the land was farmed to a certain extent by Rose MacDonald's father and grandfather, who grew a few crops and ran a number of sheep and cattle for the purpose of supplying the hotel. After this burned down, Alex MacDonald (jnr) continued to work the land, but he was not as successful by any means as suggested in the

NZ Cyclopaedia of 1908:

"Game is plentiful, the lakes and rivers are well stocked with trout, the pig-hunting and deer stalking is also obtainable. The country is devoted exclusively to sheep-farming.

"Mr Alexander MacDonald, formerly proprietor of the Kuripapango Hotel, ...took up sheep farming which he has ...successfully conducted."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the land had similar fertility and general features to that owned by the Lumsdens, south of Kuripapango. It was possible to farm it, but profitability was low, and in terms of a business venture it was not lucrative.

MacDonald soon realised this and sold or possibly leased the property to the Snelling family. They arrived after the end of World War One and did indeed attempt to farm the place. In addition they put on morning and afternoon teas for passengers on the service car. One of the specialties was strawberries and cream, both being produced fresh on the farm.<sup>2</sup> The menu also included hot buttered scones.

Sheep and cattle were both run on the land, and in 1925 the river flats were ploughed. Because of the high winds roaring through the valley the Snellings were lucky not to lose most of their topsoil. They did not attempt to plough again and indeed the land has remained unploughed to this day.<sup>3</sup>

The farming that the Snellings did was essentially limited to the valley floor: they ran some sheep outside this area, but not to any great extent.<sup>4</sup>

In 1927 the Snellings moved out, and the MacDonalds moved back in. Alexander MacDonald, however, died in 1930, leaving the property to Rose and her mother. Rose MacDonald never properly farmed the land. As she remarked to Pat Ensor, she did not need to work the land because she had all the money she required, and she lived in Kuri-

-papango because she enjoyed it.<sup>5</sup>

A few sheep were in fact run - Ngamatea would send their five year old rams down to Rose. There was no fencing as such on the farm, however, and the sheep ranged widely. The Lumsdens helped shear them on occasion. A few cows were also run on the river flats.<sup>6</sup>

Because there were no fences, the sheep would often wander down to the road, where they became targets for hunters who, having failed to shoot any pig or deer, would try to take at least a leg of mutton back with them.<sup>7</sup>

It is not known whether Rose ever made any money out of the land. Certainly it would have been very hard to turn a profit because the land did not grow much grass. Scrub and fern sprang up, so that by the 1940's the land was covered in it to quite a considerable extent - thickly enough in places to conceal a horse, as Mrs Edmond found out almost to her cost.

There was however enough stock on the farm to keep Jack occupied a good deal of the time, and although Rose could evidently do all the necessary jobs, she preferred to allow Jack to do them, spending her own time riding on the land, occasionally hunting, and talking to her guests.

It can be seen from this that the notion of Rose MacDonald running a successful farm at Kuripapango is essentially a myth. She certainly ran a few sheep and cattle, but never in any great numbers, and never with the dedication necessary to make them into a profitable investment. But this of course was not her purpose. She was essentially there because she enjoyed living on the land, and enjoyed spending her days riding, shooting and living a life of leisure. Her income was assured due to the shares she had inherited and thus she did not need to engage in an exhausting and ultimately unprofitable struggle to make a living from the relatively poor land of the area.

One can see something of her 'personality' again emerging here: she was essentially living on her property without having to work it, in similar fashion to the

'upper class' of England, and she evidently saw this as an ideal way of life. Living in this manner conformed to her conception of the way things 'should' be. Her treatment of Jack, as the 'farm labour', is a case in point.

NOTES

1. NZ Cyclopaedia, Vol 6 p 419. This extract illustrates some of the difficulties inherent in producing a comprehensive work of this nature over a relatively short time. The researchers could afford to spend only a very brief period on each area, and thus minor localities of little national significance, such as Kuripapango, tended to receive fairly superficial treatment. But this should not be seen as a failing on the part of the researchers: on the contrary, it is a testament to the thoroughness of their approach that areas such as Kuripapango received any mention at all.
2. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
3. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.
4. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
5. Ibid
6. I.Lumsden, pers. comm.
7. P.Ensor, pers. comm.

CHAPTER FOUR  
FROM FARMING TO FORESTRY

The final thirty years of the period under consideration, from 1950 to 1982, saw a fundamental change take place in the use of the land around Kuripapango. Farming ceased to be a major activity, and the Forest Service acquired much of the old farm land. The process began in 1950 when the Lumsdens sold their farm to the Forest Service: but it was another thirty two years before the MacDonald land was acquired. Both areas became part of the land scheduled for use as production forest: this area by 1982 included much of the Blowhard and areas in the southern part of the Kaweka ranges.

The period from 1950 to 1965 was essentially a 'dead' one as far as farming at Kuripapango was concerned since, apart from the superficial activities of Rose MacDonald, no farming took place. Not until John MacRae started breaking in the land in 1965 did any real farming occur.

AFFORESTATION ON THE LUMSDEN PROPERTY

The three Lumsden brothers had since the late 1940's been considering the sale of their land, and in 1950 they were able to make a sale: it was acquired under the terms of the Forest Act by the New Zealand Forest Service.

Some 20,851 acres, including the Te Kowhai and Waiwhare blocks as well as the Lumsden estate at Kuripapango, were added to State Forest 21 in that year.<sup>1</sup> In October 1950

the position of resident caretaker in the area was filled by Morrie Robson, who arrived at Kuripapango to live in the old Lumsden house, with his wife Coral. His duties included wildlife control, fire protection, and trespass control.<sup>2</sup>

There is little doubt that Morrie Robson was one of the most colourful figures to live at Kuripapango. His exploits in the bush around the area now form part of the 'legendary history' of the area, having found their way into books such as Lester Masters' Tales of the Mails. The house in which he lived at Kuripapango is now called Robson Lodge in honour of his work there.

The land around Kohinga on the old Lumsden property was allowed to grow a covering of scrub during the early 1950's, the intention being to try and prevent erosion. Then in the early 1960's preparation went ahead towards production planting. In 1964 the first hundred acres of a planned 10,000 acre production forest were planted.<sup>3</sup>

In this manner the old Lumsden farm was gradually converted into production forest. By 1984 there were still areas that had not been planted, but other areas were contour-planted and the trees were helping to prevent erosion.

#### NOTES

1. Preliminary Working Plan, SF21, 1956-66, p5.
2. Ibid
3. Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune, report 27/2/64.

#### THE MACRAE FARM

In 1965, Rose MacDonald sold her property to R.S.MacRae. The land was not at the time in good condition regarding possible use as a farm: large areas were covered in scrub and were unsuitable for grazing. But the land had some potential. MacRae's son J.S.MacRae began breaking in the land, starting on the relatively flat area near the Ngaruroro.<sup>1</sup>

While researching this report, the author contacted

both of the MacRaes, but unfortunately neither was available for interview. Thus, again, reliance has had to be placed on the relatively sketchy information available from documents and from those involved in a peripheral fashion.

It appears that over a number of years the land was gradually cleared, with 'pockets' of grassland gradually being developed on the flatter areas, while the slopes remained clad in scrub. Sheep were run on the grassed areas, and the old stables were converted into a shearing shed. No house as such was built on the property, although as mentioned MacRae lived at times in the old MacDonald house.

Because the MacRaes financed their land-clearance from income off the land, the total cleared during the time that they farmed was not particularly great. John MacRae acquired full ownership from his father in 1975 and began working the property on a more full-time basis. By 1979 he had erected four miles of fencing, and although this did not completely fence the grassed areas, the relatively thick scrub tended to deter his stock from wandering.

By 1979, some 1500 Perendale ewes and a few cattle were being run on the cleared land, with a lambing percentage of just over 100.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, MacRae used a root-rake to clear six hectares along the roadside: this was then sown to pasture. By 1980 this had become well established but was quite thin due to the fact that the clearing operation had been highly effective and had removed all litter from the ground. By this time some 180 hectares of flat and rolling land had been put into pasture, but the higher slopes remained scrub-clad.

MacRae applied to the County Council to clear a further 20 hectares of scrub in 1979, and this prompted a survey of the property by the County Council. They isolated five distinct areas of land-use as follows:

- (1) Steep high country. This was to the west and subject to severe erosion, with the high tops being mainly bare pumice. It was suggested that this area should be transferred to the

Forest Service for inclusion in the Kaweka State Forest Park as a 'protection area'.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Rolling hill country. This included some 90 hectares near the road which had been in pasture for some years, and another 200 hectares of scrub. The soils were found to be not conducive to pasture growth, but it was felt that pasture could be established provided wind-erosion and the shallow soil could be considered.<sup>4</sup>

(3) Some 343 hectares on the eastern border of the land were not recommended for pastoral use, but it was thought that productive forest could be planted there. The land at the time had thin scrub cover.

(4) This area was south of the road and consisted of steep hill country clothed in thick scrub. It was thought that a third of it could be converted to pasture, but that clearing would only be possible by hand or roller so that the relatively thin topsoil would not be pushed off.

A fifth area, on the river flats, was also identified in the report: this had been in pasture for many years and was well established.<sup>5</sup>

It was recommended that permits be issued to clear scrub on areas Two and Four: but that due to limited funds, it might not be possible to control erosion should it occur on cleared and grassed areas.<sup>6</sup>

The New Zealand Forest Service had for some time been looking at the land with a view to purchasing it, because it appeared to have better value as production forest than as a farm. Also it would be possible to protect the more erosion-prone areas. However, the opportunity to purchase did not come until December 1981, when MacRae began looking at the land with a view to selling it.

The land was again inspected in February 1982, this



time by a Land Use Committee that included officers from the Forest Service, Department of Lands and Survey, Ministry of Works and Development, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. They concluded that:

"It was felt [that] under very efficient management the property could carry about 4000 stock units. Given average management this would be reduced to about 3500 stock units. In view of the altitude of the land, the lengthy winter and severe wind exposure, these estimates might be optimistic. Other disadvantages include the lack of a house, electricity and adequate shearing shed and yards. The isolation is another problem, the nearest farm being about 10km to the west into the range and the nearest neighbour to the east being about 20 km away.

"It was also agreed that the 180 hectares of developed pasture would not be suitable as a long-term grazing lease. It would be of interest only to farms in dry areas at a considerable distance away and then only occasionally during particularly dry spells.

"It was agreed that there are about 800 hectares suitable for production forestry and that management of the forest would be best as part of the Kaweka State Forest park."<sup>7</sup>

An agreement was reached with MacRae in February 1982, by which the property was sold to the New Zealand Forest Service. The flats in the Kuripapango valley itself were however leased back to MacRae.<sup>8</sup>

The land held by the Forest Service was subsequently prepared for production, except in those areas which the survey had indicated required protection. By the beginning of 1984 areas of scrub had been cleared and work was proceeding towards a major planting program. Four

compartments had been identified, the plan being to plant one each year from 1984 to 1987 inclusive.

It was also hoped to establish an 'ecological area' around the Lakes, and it was suggested that access to them should be minimised, with the legal road line past them being revoked. The interest in the Lakes was that they:

"Provide a remarkable example of how vegetation around a lake depends on the water level regime ...the Kaweka Lakes constitute lake systems, vegetation and flora of considerable importance."<sup>9</sup>

Public access could be detrimental to the ecological balance of the lakes. In point of fact, it was quite possible, although difficult, for a four wheel drive vehicle to actually reach the shore of the western Lake.

#### NOTES

1. P.Ensor, pers. comm.
2. NZFS File 15/5/1, Hawkes Bay Catchment Board land-use report.
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Ibid
7. NZFS File 15/5/1, Report dated 11/2/82.
8. Ibid
9. NZFS File 30/02/5, letter 13/1/82 from A.P.Druce, DSIR Botany Division, to Conservator of Forests.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the history of farming at Kuripapango.

Firstly, it is clear that the condition of the road was an important factor in the development of farming in the region. It was of vital importance both to supply the

stations, and also as the route by which they were able to take their wool clip to market. To a limited degree it was also a source of income: the Lumsdens worked for the County Council during the 1940's, partly to ensure access to their own property.

Perhaps the most important point to be made is that the area was not at any time a prime farming area. The land, by its very nature, was not conducive to farming: the thin soils, the steep hills, the high winds, the scrub and also the lack of high technology equipment all contributed to make farming into an endless uphill battle. In some areas, ploughing, and repeated burning and grazing, has left damage which is still visible today: the Blowhard, for instance, is a prime example of such one-time farmland that is today eroded and wind-worn. Indeed, even in the period under consideration this damage was evident, having originated in the 19th century when Mangawhare used the Blowhard as its main grazing area. By the 20th century there was little left that the farmers of the area could use.

In addition to the difficulties innate to the land, farmers in the 20th century had to contend with poachers entering the area: with the poor road which hampered transport: with economic downturn: and at times with an unsure market.

There were, all told, only four farms in the area throughout the period under consideration: the Lumsdens, the Snellings: the MacDonalds: and the MacRaes. Of the four, only the Lumsdens maintained the attempt for more than ten or fifteen years. The Snellings lasted less than ten: and Rose MacDonald did not really farm at all.

The areas once farmed around Kuripapango are currently owned by the Forest Service, and indeed their use as production forest is perhaps the only use to which the land can economically and effectively be put. Even with the enhanced farming techniques that became available during the 1950's - techniques

such as aerial topdressing, for instance - it was virtually impossible to effectively farm the land. Thus when considering the less advanced farming techniques available in the early part of this century, it is a testimony to the labour and dedication of the early farmers at Kuripapango that they were able to make a living from the land at all.

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