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MARAEKAKAHO STATION, HAWKES BAY

In the Farmer for May 1894, we gave a detailed description of "Maraekakaho" the property of Mr Douglas MacLean. For its excellent management and appointments this is considered one of the model stations of Hawkes Bay. From our former article above referred to we take the following particulars:-

Starting from Hastings by coach, the road to 'Maraekakaho' lies across the Heretaunga plains. The head station lies beyond these at the foot of a steep limestone ridge, where the Ngaruroro River comes through some hills into the plains, and here the residence of the manager is situated, about two miles after passing over the boundary-- of the property. The proprietor's house lies a few miles farther up the course of the Maraekakaho stream, which here joins the Ngaruroro. The whole estate comprises some 45,000 acres.

The station lay, it was seen, to the south of the Ngaruroro river, and to the west of the great plain that lies around Hastings. A portion, indeed, of the latter area is included in Maraekakaho. Along the Ngaruroro and the Maraekakaho is a big stretch of flat underlaid with shingle. The soil on this is of good quality, is rather sandy and produces good grass. The flats on the place however differ materially in kind and in value. Some of them are swampy, flax and toi grass grow on them and when cleared and drained such flats give very good returns. As a rule the drained swamps make the best soil and more cultivation is done upon them when they have been broken in than upon the shingly flats. The great bulk of the holding, however is made up of rolling upland, taking the form of long and branching spurs, fairly broad in the back and rather to be called easy of undulation than leveltopped. Little winding gullies diversify the spurs, which take a steeper dip as the hollows are approached. The roads which run through the property wind and dip frequently to get an easy grade, and at times the slopes are stiff enough. The elevations run pretty high too getting into the thousands and there is an odd commixture of Maori and Highland names, Ben Ledi and Ben Voirlich being cheek by jowl with Raukawa and Whakapirau. Where cut through and exposed to view, the surface soil was of a dark sandy nature, varying from six inches to a foot in depth, with a yellow open subsoil, said to pass water well. Below was the limestone, which indeed was jutting through in places, and being darkened by the weather, looked like stumps at times. With the exception of two very useful and ornamental patches of natural bush, islands in a sea of fern and scrub, there was no forest, and so no stumps are to be seen. At the first the station was covered with natural grass, tall fern, three and four feet high, toi-toi, and manuka scrub. The swamps were covered with the

growth usually found in swampy situations - raupo, toi grass, cutty grass, and tall flax with a sprinkling of cabbage trees. In the main this has been got under, but it was a work of time. All this was thirty-five years ago, since when great changes have taken place, and most of the points of likeness between then and now have passed away.

The paddocks are now in English grasses, and have all been under the plough at different periods. The cropping areas are changed year by year. The slopes, although steep, had all been broken up by the ordinary two furrow plough and four horses. There are altogether upwards of 200 miles of fencing on the station, which is subdivided into 64 paddocks the fences being of course, wire, five plain and a barbed wire on top.

The cropping land yields an average of 45 bushels of oats and 40 bushels of Cape barley to the acre in an ordinary season. Most of the property lies well above flood level. Those who have taken a part in the rough work of pioneering can alone form some notion of the time, the loss, the business courage needed to break in a big run from its first condition to its present state as at Maraekakaho. Even then, when the right methods have been hit upon after many false starts made and wrong directions in trials and experiments, those who have gone through the mill are apt to forget old hardships and what the real value of the gold of final experience is worth. In the beginning the natural grazing powers of the run lay mainly in the natural grass, on which the Merinos did well. The history of sheep farming in Hawkes Bay begins with Merinos. When it was sought to replace the natural herbage with English grasses, the best way of getting rid of fern and the best varieties of grass to use were things unknown. Experience, which really meant trial and experiment, had to be paid for. It has been found that two methods can be pursued for turning heavy fern land into grass, the first way being with surface sowing. In this way, as proved at Maraekakaho, the fire is run through the fern, and the subdivisions are run up at once. The grass seed is surface sown, and when the young, uncurling fern leaves are about four inches high, the sheep are put on to 'crush' the fern as some term it, to have a decided effect on it. Attention is needed when the fern stem is bleeding, and when it comes into 'flower' again bring in the stock as before, and so on till the frosts come in, which have a great checking influence of themselves. The tramping assists the young grass and cripples the fern and this method persisted in till the grass gets well advanced, will keep the fern down. Once let the fern get ahead of you and the game is up.

The other way is to plough after burning off, disc and plant with rape. The rape is fed off from autumn right up to February by spells. The paddocks are then ploughed again, tine and chain harrowed, and laid down to permanent pasture. This method is more effective, but more expensive

than the first. Two bushels of grass seed per acre are used. The mixture adopted is perennial rye, cocksfoot, red clover, cow grass, alsike, timothy (best on low ground), crested dogtail and prairie grass.

There are about 56,000 sheep on Maraekakaho. As before said the start in sheep rearing was with Merinos. The introduction of artificial pastures affected the Merinos with footrot and a change had to be made to crossbreds. The Merinos were excellent of their kind, a start being made with rams of Learmonth blood, followed by James Gibson's pure Merinos. The change was then made by introducing the best longwool sheep from the South, the flocks of J Reid, J.B. Sutton, F. Sutton, M. Holmes, and the Land Association. With longwool rams the flocks were brought on to half breds and comebacks. When a type of seven-eighths Lincoln blood is attained then Merino rams are used with long woolled ewes. By care in crossing and mating a type of sheep has been obtained combining constitution, symmetry, carcase and wool. The latter is of well-known character and fame, having won the highest awards at Hawkes Bay, Paris, Melbourne, Chicago and Dunedin. At the Hawkes Bay Shows, some of the best judges have declared the Maraekakaho halfbreds to be second to none in New Zealand. Stud flocks of Merino and Lincolns are kept up. The station is found to be very sound and good for the sheep, and neither drenching nor fumigation has to be resorted to. The best wool is sent Home for sale, the dirty wool is sold in Napier. The Merino brand is MLN, the crossbred is a Lochaber axe. 1,500 bales of the 1893-94 clip were sent away. Three hundred acres of rape are grown principally to bring on weaners. Freezers mature as two-tooths when they weigh about 60 to 65 lb.

The woolshed, of which we give an illustration, is the boss of the outbuildings. The whole of the shearing shed, the night pen, the yards and approaches, are battenfloored. All dirt, ordure, and moisture falls below; the vertically sliding gates are counterweighted; the drafting shoot has double doors at the end, so that one man can divert Merinos one way, crossbreds another, while lambs can be let run straight on. Water is laid on throughout the buildings. There are 28 Wolseley shearing machines; they give every satisfaction. Only with some wrinkly throated Merinos showing traces of Vermont blood, might the shears be preferably used. The means for handling the wool after shearing are perfect. The wool press is good of its kind, and the loading arrangement is very good. At one end of the shed is a concrete dip 60 feet long, giving a good swim. The dips used have included those of Murton, Quibell, and Cooper, all pronounced effective, as is an arsenic preparation made on the place. The main shed and the night pen will hold between them 3400 sheep. In full swing, 3000 sheep are shorn in a day. The price for shearing is 17s 6d per 100. Between sixty and seventy men are permanently employed on the station, and twice as many at shearing time. Wages are 25s per week and found.