

SWINBURN, Helen Margaret. Peacefully on August 2, 2015. Loving Sister to Jacqueline, John, the late Kerry and Mary, and beloved Aunt of Gael, Helen, John, Tim, Rose, Cathy, Sue, Ben, John and Pete. Great Aunt to many Great Nieces and Nephews. Passionate Farmer and Farm Forester to the end. A memorial gathering for Helen will be held at the CHB Municipal Theatre, Waipawa on Saturday August 15, at 2.30pm. In lieu of flowers donations to QEII trust would be appreciated. These and any messages may be left at the service or posted to, The Swinburn Family, C/- PO Box 200, Waipukurau. C. H. B. Funeral Services Ltd, FDANZ Waipukurau

Published in Hawkes Bay Today on Aug. 8, 2015

I'll tell you about someone special who has just died. Unless you live here in Hawke's Bay, you are unlikely to have heard of her. She was quiet, modest and unassuming. But a remarkable woman none the less.

Helen Swinburn died last week at the good age of 89. She was still farming up until only a few days before she died so not quite with her boots on but as close as you can get which is exactly how she would have preferred.

Helen started her farming career at 17 when she left school early to join the Woman's Land Army during the Second World War to help fill the gaps left by all the rural men who had gone to serve their country.

At this young age she was in sole charge of Moonlight, a family farm of 800 acres or 320 hectares in modern parlance. Coincidentally my eldest son Jason is managing that block which is part of a larger farm now owned by a different family.

Not only was she a young woman working in what had been a male dominated world and dealing with stock agents who had never had a woman as a client before but she was less than five feet tall. This height deficit was compounded a few years into her farming career when she got arsenic poisoning from sheep dipping which nearly killed her but caused her bones to crumble a bit making her even shorter.

But this small stature never held her back and she performed all the farm tasks that all the rest of us do. She was pretty tough.

When the men came back from the war she moved on to work at Te Aute Station and then farmed in Australia for a year or two.

On her return she bought a property in the Hinerua district on Wakarara Road up near the foothills of the Ruahine Ranges and this is where she spent the rest of her life working and developing a good performing farm.

She was awarded the Hawkes Bay Farm Forester of the Year and won a Regional Council Environmental Award for her great conservation efforts. Her stock were always good and she loved her many dogs.

I met her some thirty years ago when she became a ram client. Well before ultrasound scanning became available, Helen was catching and marking all her twin ewe lambs and only breeding from them and was getting lambing percentages of 140% when most thought 120% was a lofty goal. When the lad mentioned above was born, she gave us a Pinus Pinea (stone pine) which is now a decent sized tree bearing lots of cones full of the little pine nuts.

I'd asked her a few times to interview her for my radio show but she was too humble for that sort of thing. However the last time I saw her a couple of months ago at a field day she relented when I asked if I could do an interview just for her extended family. Sadly I hadn't got around to going up to her place to do it.

She mentored and encouraged many people and had a great number of friends and a lot of folk who admired her.

She never married, nor smoked and might have had a glass of bubbles at Christmas time so lived a simple and healthy life.

Helen was a contented person doing what she loved.

- from the Spring 2015 newsletter of Marlow Coopworths (Steve Wyn-Harris, RD1, Waipukurau

## Te Whiti-O-Tu Pa

The Te Whiti-O-Tu Pa on **Helen Swinburn**'s Hawke's Bay property was built on a small hillock at the top of sheer 100-metre cliffs above the Waipawa River, a dramatic defensive location near the foot of the Ruahine Ranges.

It was the site of a decisive battle in or around 1831, when the Ngapuhi and Ngati Whatuiapiti tribes defeated Ngai Te Upokoiri and Ngati Tuwharetoa, in a fierce engagement.

Protected by a QEII covenant, the remains of a tihi (platform) and a series of terraces descending down from it can be seen.

Helen manages the pa site under light grazing to maintain a grass sward that allows the earthworks to be seen and is delighted that school groups visit the site regularly.

She has also protected an adjoining area of black beech and totara forest under the covenant.



*Above:* Te Whiti-O-Tu Pa, protected by a QEII covenant in perpetuity. The small hill above the sheer cliffs of the Waipawa River was a strategic location and a dramatic battle site.