

David Hildreth,
P.O. Box 319,
Hastings.

Dear David,

Raewyn passed your letter of the 28.12.00 to me as the historical rep/researcher on Hastings District Heritage Trails Inc. and below is a brief history of Blowhard Bush Reserve as taken from station records, HBCC and National Library in no particular chronological order.

Let us start with the geographical location of Blowhard Bush which lies on the eastern slope of the Glen Ross Range (Blowhard Ridge) at an altitude between 700m and 830m above mean sea level, at the junction of the Napier-Taihape and Lawrence Roads 53.3 km. from Hastings.

Geology. The rock underlying the soil and tephra is recently laid down limestone formed in a seaway between 2.5 to 6 six million years ago. These coquina limestone beds were formed from shell banks of barnacles in a fast flowing, shallow sea way. The movement of the adjoining fault lines appears to have vertically fractured the limestone into blocks that have been eroded by weak carbonic acid rain into solution corridors and isolated tors.

During the late Pleistocene and Holocene, 0.1 million years ago to present, saw the development of a river drainage pattern affected by tectonic plate subduction that has been confirmed by the tephra record, for during the past 40,000 years Hawke's Bay has been periodically coated with tephra from the volcanic plateau, together with locally derived loess deposits.

About 14,000 to 10,000 years ago, ash reaching this area formed a reddish brown soil as a base for tree and plant growth. In 186 A.D. the hot Taupo ash shower burnt most of the existing plant cover leaving traces of burnt timber. This eruption was the greatest recorded explosion known to man on earth. It was recorded in both China and Rome when ash from the eruption obscured the sun, turning sunsets dark red. From the remains of plant leaves buried by the eruption, it appeared the largest explosion took place from late March to April, with smaller eruptions continuing for some time.

History. Blowhard Bush Reserve lay alongside an important Maori Trail into the interior that in European times became known as the Inland Patea Trail. This route follows the present Taihape Road to pass through Kuripapango. Recorded information dates from 1851 when William Colenso crossed the range to reach the Inland Patea

Waiwhare Station which included Blowhard Bush Reserve was first recorded as stocked with merino wethers in 1873 (date of first lease). Pigs were already established on the Blowhard plateau when stocking began and were hunted from 1875 onwards as were troublesome wild dogs.

Rabbits were first observed following the summer of 1890 and reach peak population in 1905. The first red deer was observed in 1903, Japanese deer did not reach the reserve until 1959 when two were shot close to where Lowry Shelter is today. Wild merino type sheep persisted on the upper grassy slopes of the reserve until 1969.

Pre-European burning for cultivation was practised to the east of the Reserve and vague oral traditions of former major fires in this area, that swept from the valley to the east to the crest of the Kaweka Ranges but were parted by the limestone walls of the Reserve. Evidence of numerous fires occurring in the 1700s has been found on the Blowhard plateau.

William Colenso (1851-2) mentions recent fires in the vicinity of the reserve and in 1875 a fire to clear bracken also ran out of control for several days, burning a mustera's camp on Waiwhare. The following year a further attempt was made to burn the remainder of plant cover but a large part of the central reserve resisted all attempts and was left with original forest. Over the summer of 1878/9 dry regenerating bracken was burnt again and imported grasses sown in the autumn. In 1885 rank grass close to the shepherds whare caught fire during an extensive fire on the Blowhard Plateau when hot debris was carried by the southerly wind. Following this, several fires swept parts of Waiwhare Station until a wild fire burnt the upper forest of the Reserve in 1905. In 1946 a large fire totally encircled the Reserve during a major drought but did not enter the maze of limestone passages. In December 1963 a small fire occurred alongside the Napier - Taihape Road but was brought under control by N.Z. Forestry Staff with only 900 sq.m. affected.

Since 1963 there have been no fires in the reserve other than acts of vandalism when fires were lit on the timber flooring of Lowry Lodge, as a result of this vandalism, the building was relocated to the crest of the range as a shelter with no fireplace or stove.

Blowhard Bush Reserve is cared for by the Hastings-Havelock North branch of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society who paid for and built Lowry Lodge close to Lawrence Road. It was Mr & Mrs Lowry of Oreka, Fernhill, who donated Blowhard Bush to the society in July 1962. The lodge was dismantled in August 1993 and rebuilt on its present site by the writer with the assistance of Periodic Detainees from the Justice Department to act as a shelter for parties visiting the crest of the range.

Since 1970 the writer has managed the reserve and designed the present track system. It was during the 1970s and through the 1980s that with the assistance of Intermediate School Children, the writer revegetated the tephra desert on the crest of Blowhard Ridge and today a young forest grows taller each year but the removal of wilding pines from DoC land to the west is an expensive exercise, as is the control of animal pests.

(The story of the Maori family who lived secretly in the reserve during the early 1800s is restricted from publication or release by the writer until November 2001 on the request of family descendants.) (The story of the fallen warriors is also embargoed until I receive a release from a

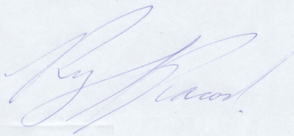
few more of the tribal elders. N.B. They were prior to Ngati Kahungunu control and hard to locate or contact.)

Noting your interest in the history of this area, during my research I found many anomalies in official run records. The run records did not agree with letters written to families in the U.K. by managers and workers. It was as if the run records were written to please the landowners. A group in the U.K. has collected the detail from many of the letters and once they come to an agreement with their late co-ordinator's executors, they will be publishing a book covering a great deal of the Hastings District. I have worked with his group for the past six years, checking material and it places a very different slant on the early land owners as seen by their staff.

It is interesting to note a famous teller of tall tales, Dick Ensor was correct about a family living in Blowhard Bush but maybe the number of children was overstated. The remains reburied after a cyclonic storm were of six infants and a mature person. Some of his other stories like the one about Devil's Gap have also been substantiated from several sources.

In closing I should advise that I have a book on the area just awaiting clearance from a few people called, "The Heritage and Walking Trails of Hawke's Bay" .

Regards,



Roy J Peacock.