

Walter, David (1979)

Farming and social patterns in the
Whangamomona Riding of Stratford County
Council, Taranaki

Farming And Social Patterns in the WHANGAMOMONA RIDING of Stratford County Council Taranaki



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ELLOGG'S RURAL
P COURSE
LLEGE 1979

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1.0

PREFACE

To many outsiders, the popular farming image of Taranaki is that of dairying, and indeed this would be so if the Taranaki land area was restricted to the ring plain surrounding Mt Egmont.

However much of inland Taranaki comprises steep hill country, located in the eastern parts of the Clifton, Inglewood, Stratford, Eltham, Hawera (District Council) and Patea Counties.

The Whangamomona Riding of the Stratford County covers almost 110,000 hectares. This represents approximately half of the county area, and nearly 14% of the Taranaki province.

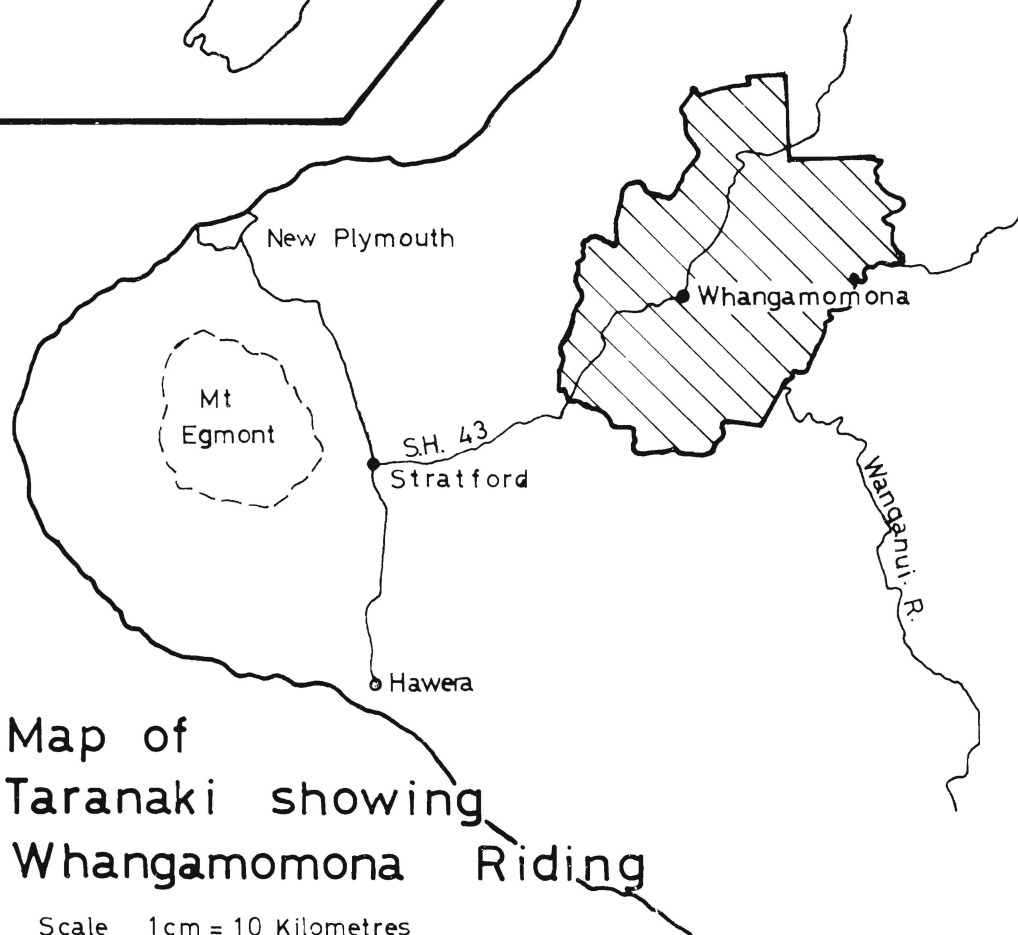
The project was designed to gather up-to-date information of farming and social trends and attitudes in this isolated hill country district.

In several aspects, the farming and social trends highlighted will reflect those in similar hill country areas of New Zealand.

The conclusions and recommendations based on the findings are put forward to help assess and formulate the place in New Zealand's economy and society of such areas as the Whangamomona Riding.

2.1

Map of North Island showing Whangamomona Riding





KEY

----- Railway

⊙ Primary School

 Te Wera State Forest

WHANGAMOMONA RIDING

Scale 1 cm = 2.5 Kilometres

3.0

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

The Whangamomona Riding of the Stratford County was previously a separate territorial local authority, the Whangamomona County Council, until merged with the Stratford County in 1955.

The area of 108,707 hectares forms approximately half of the Stratford County area of 216,265 hectares, and nearly 14% of the total land area under the Taranaki United Council of 790,112 hectares.

Less than half of the Whangamomona Riding land area is rateable, indicating the large part still clothed in indigenous native forest, much of which is crown land unlikely to be developed for pastoral farming.

The study area is mainly steep-sided hill country with valley floors, the few areas of flat or table-land being small and widely scattered.

For the project, 83 land holdings covering 52,522 hectares, 48% of the riding land area, were studied.

This number constituted the known farming units in the riding, almost all of which derived their income from sheep and beef cattle.

The populated districts stretch from Strathmore in the west, 30 km from the nearest service town of Stratford, to the Tangarakau Gorge in the east, 90 km from Stratford, travelling State Highway 43.

Physically the area is effectively divided into two by the Whangamomona Saddle, a sharp crested ridge line almost 60 km from Stratford on State Highway 43.

This saddle is traversed by 8 km of narrow, winding metal road through native forest.

West of the Whangamomona Saddle lie the distinct districts of Strathmore-Huiakama-Te Wera, Makahu and Pohokura.

To the east are Whangamomona, Kohuratahi-Marco and Tahora.

4.0

SHORT HISTORY OF STUDY AREA

4.1

PRE-EUROPEAN

The pre-European Maoris used tracks through the area for some centuries prior to European surveyors entering the bush-clad land from the west in the 1870's.

There is little evidence of significant permanent Maori settlement occurring in the area compared with other regions of New Zealand.

4.2

1890-1914

Land development for farming began in the early 1890s. This occurred as a result of price increases for primary produce, a shortage of farming land and legislative policies directed towards boosting farm settlement.

The farming frontiers consequently advanced finger-like into the eastern Taranaki hill country from the lowlands to the west.

Under Improved Farm Settlement Schemes, or Special Settler Association systems, families with limited capital arrived in the district to take up small blocks averaging about 200 acres of bushland.

The men initially worked on road formation for much of their time, the income from which enabled them to develop their land.

Early farming was concentrated on the easier country, with dairy cows and creameries becoming prevalent.

Not all settlement was successful, and several of the smaller holdings were merged, first in the earlier years, and again after the initial decade of development to 1902, when the agricultural expansion rate declined and population consolidated.

Difficulties of access were immense, and frustrations of the settlers resulted in the area breaking away from the Stratford County in 1908 to form a separate Whangamomona County.

The railway from Stratford to link with the main trunk line was started in 1901, reached Te Wera in 1910, Whangamomona in 1914, was formed to Tahora by 1920, and eventually joined up with the main trunk in 1932.

These access problems seriously affected realisation of agricultural potential in the area, as high freight prices and isolation deterred progressive development and settlement.

The development of the nucleated village settlements during the period up to World War One resulted in community bases.

Small businesses were set up to serve the settlers, as well as the workforces engaged in milling, roadmaking, railway formation and so on.

Population in the Whangamomona County in the period around 1910 was over 1,500, about four times the present level.

4.3

1914-45

Agriculturally, problems were created with the exodus of manpower for the 1914-19 War, and soon after, the effects of the 1921 depression.

The early fertility of the bush burns had declined, lack of finance and manpower led to reversion of land, and many farmers faced serious financial problems.

During the period between the two world wars, a combination of these and other factors, as well as the drastic effects of the 1929-35 depression saw many hundreds of acres of hill country revert to secondary growth.

In the more remote areas, crippling roading costs and lack of metal in some parts resulted in acute problems of access.

Coupled with the difficult farming conditions, the isolation led to the eventual abandonment of some properties, notably in the Aotuhia area, where over 30 crown leasehold blocks were abandoned - a total area exceeding 9,500 hectares.

This trend of land being lost to pastoral farming, farm units becoming bigger and fewer, allied with the gradual depopulation, carried through to 1945.

Population of the Whangamomona County in the 1945 census was 851, 35% less than the 1936 figure of 1301.

4.4

1945-66

Agriculture took a boost following the wool boom and development of aerial topdressing in the early 1950s, and gradually the dairy herds remaining disappeared as farmers concentrated on sheep and beef cattle.

The return and rehabilitation of soldiers from the 1939-45 war also had an influence in revitalising farming and social development through this period, with population figures varying little between 1945 and 1961.

Redevelopment of reverted land in individual holdings was generally less evident between 1945 and 1960 than better utilisation of existing clear land, aided by better product prices and some improved mechanisation.

In 1951 an exotic State Forest was established at Te Wera of 5480 hectares, while during the same decade further acquisition of marginal private land by the crown was undertaken to form Government Land Development Blocks at Makahu (418 Ha.), Pohokura (537 Ha.), Kohuratahi (2560 Ha.) and Mt Damper (2049 Ha.).

The Te Wera forest planting covered 1551 Ha. by 1978, and major clear-felling is scheduled for 1981 or 1982.

The Kohuratahi Land Development Block was subdivided and settled into four farm units in 1975. The Mt Damper Block is still to be settled, while it appears at this stage uncertain whether the Pohokura and Makahu Blocks will be re-settled because of their contribution to farm-forestry management in the nearby Te Wera State Forest.

During the first half of the 1960s, stock numbers increased markedly in the Whangamomona Riding, a direct result of the favourable product prices, particularly from sheep.

This increase resulted from both intensified stocking rates and activity in the redevelopment of reverted hill country, on some farms financed by Government development loans.

4.5

1966-79

The dramatic drop in wool prices in late 1966 triggered another downturn for farmers and the communities in the study area, as retrenchment took place.

Sheep numbers peaked around 1968-9, while beef cattle numbers rose gradually into the 1970s. Dairy herds continued to disappear, leaving only three in the Strathmore area of the riding in 1979-80 season.

East Taranaki Hill Country was the subject of several departmental reports, each in turn attempting to find reasons and solutions for the economic downturn affecting farmers and the land.

Up to the mid-1970s, the policy of amalgamating farm units was pursued. Farmers were financed into purchasing adjacent blocks of land to improve their viability, thus further reducing the number of land holdings in the area.

This trend, along with a reduction in family sizes and declining numbers living in local villages resulted in the population of the riding being almost halved between 1961 and 1976 - from 869 to 458.

The largest drop occurred in the years 1966 to 1971, from 712 to 552, while indications from this survey are of a further drop since 1976 of over 20%.

Despite an upturn in beef prices in the early 1970s, agricultural production from the area remained static until 1978.

Three unusually dry summers in 1970, 1973 and 1978, together with general farmer reluctance to restock at higher levels previously advocated and sometimes adopted, and the effects of double figure inflation during the 1970s all affected the increase of stocking and output levels.

The 1978 budget introduced by the National Government included the Land Development Encouragement Loans, which included suspensory loans to redevelop reverted land.

As well, the previously introduced Livestock Incentive Scheme which entailed cash grants to increase stock numbers, was available to farmers.

A return to high beef prices, following five poor years, and correspondingly strong markets for wool and sheep meats have meant much better returns to farmers in 1979.

These combined influences are starting to become evident in a recent boost in land redevelopment, and a commencement of production increases.

Meanwhile the 1960s and 1970s saw a loss of services, halving of the population, and the near demise of the nucleated villages in the Whangamomona Riding.

5.0

METHODOLOGY OF SURVEYS

Surveys of the study area were conducted in June and July, 1979, to gather information on agricultural and social patterns at that time.

Two distinct surveys were completed, each carried out within the restraints of resources, finances and time.

5.1

GENERAL SURVEY

Each farm holding was individually analysed using personal and local knowledge and observations.

As well, data from the Stratford County valuation roll was used, relevant information from previous writings published on the area, together with personal background knowledge on the districts.

Within the General Survey, an analysis was also done on non-farming residents in the study area, and local villages, etc.

5.2
POSTAL SURVEY

A questionnaire was sent to each of the 83 farmed holdings, to be replied to on an anonymous basis and returned in an enclosed stamped envelope.

Questionnaire forms were returned by 45 farmers before the close-off date, a number sufficient to gain worthwhile trends and attitudes of those living in the study area.

5.3
Farm holdings for the purpose of the survey included some properties that farmed run-offs together with the base home unit. They also included those with managers, who themselves were questioned in the postal survey, and some absentee-owned properties with no residence.

5.4
As pointed out under the General Survey, the findings were compiled and processed with limitations of resources, finance and time.
Within these confines, every attempt has been made for accuracy and authenticity of the results; if any slight error should become obvious, the effects are most unlikely to significantly alter the basis for findings from the surveys.
Copies of the General and Postal Survey questionnaires are included in subsequent pages, prior to the listed results.

6.0
GENERAL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Size of holding (from Valuation Roll).
2. Status of occupier - whether owner, lessee, manager, absentee owner.
3. If farmer and/or spouse have a significant off/farm income - e.g. a farm outside the study area, contracting, shearing, opossums, craft, teaching, urban job, etc.
4. Age group of farmer - under 35, 35-45, 45-55, over 55.
5. How long farmer has been in control of farm - under 5 years., 5-15, 15-30, over 30 years.
6. Length of time farm has been in the same family if handed down. Under 10 years, 10-20, 20-40, 40-60, over 60 years.
7. If the farm has increased significantly in size since 1945.
8. Permanent labour employed on farm.
9. Age of farm homesteads — under 20 years, 20-50, over 50 years.
10. Condition of farm homestead and surrounds - Attractive, neat, plain, untidy.
11. Surplus houses on farm, if occupied and by whom.
12. Scope for increased production on farm - significant, reasonable, very little.
13. Number of primary school, secondary school, pre-school children on holding.
14. Villages - number of families, occupations, empty houses, shops, industries, etc.

7.0
GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS

7.1
SIZE OF HOLDING

Over 1000 Ha. .14 17%	600- 1000 Ha. 14 17%	300- 600 Ha. 26 31%	200- 300 Ha. 15 18%	100- 200 Ha. 11 13%	Under 100 Ha. 3 4%
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Overall average size of holdings — 633 Ha.

COMMENT
A fuller analysis of farm sizes, topography, land cover, stocking rates, etc. appears in the results of the postal survey.

7.2
STATUS OF OCCUPIER

Owner-farmer	69	83%
Manager	4	5%
Absentee-owner	10	12%
Total	83	

COMMENT
7.2.1

The owner-farmer category may include family trusts, companies, partnerships, estates, etc.

7.2.2

Of the four farm managers, three are on Government Development Blocks, one on a private farm.

7.2.3

Of the 10 absentee owners, 6 are farmers, 4 are non-farmers, one of whom employs a manager.

3 of the 6 farmers work their property from Stratford, while the other three hold crown grazing licences on the holdings, which are previously abandoned blocks.

Absentee owned and farms not lived on are generally farmed less intensively than other properties in the area, though for various reasons.

The 'city-businessman' and 'hippie-type' land owners at this stage are insignificant in number - less than 5%, most of whom have bought in during the last ten years.

Increases in fuel prices may in the future limit the number of absentee or non-residential owners and farmers; however, if numbers increase, the effect on land prices may be noticed.

7.3
OFF-FARM INCOME

Number of farm holdings with substantial off-farm income - 24. (29%)

Absentee farmers	10
Owning farms outside area	6
Opossums	3
Shearing, contracting etc.	4
Forestry Work	1
Total	24

COMMENT

7.3.1

A figure of approximately \$3,000 per annum was set as a guide for defining substantial. Obviously this finding cannot be absolutely accurate because of individual's private businesses not being investigated.

7.3.2

Little opportunity for a second family income exists in the area for farmers, farm workers, and other workers in the villages.

7.3.3

There was no evidence of any craft or cottage industries, or off-farm income opportunities in any significance outside those related to the land.

7.3.4

Some of those farmers earning off-farm incomes appeared to be neglecting farm maintenance.

7.4

AGE OF FARMERS

Under 35 years	27	33%
35-45 years	17	20%
45-55 years	19	23%
Over 55 years	20	24%
Total	83	

COMMENT

7.4.1

This study takes in farm managers, and allows for the few cases of joint ownership; four properties were dually owned by unrelated people.

7.4.2

More than half of the farmers in the over 55 age group have sons either owning land in the area themselves, or with some major decisionmaking role in the farm enterprise.

7.4.3

The disparity in effectiveness of farmers in the over 55 age group is wide, and in fact through all the age-ranges can not be directly connected with age.

Generally speaking, the older farmers are on smaller, better developed farms, and the younger ones on blocks with more development potential and larger.

7.4.4

As some sons hold units in the area as well as their father, the possibility of these separate holdings merging when the father sells out is a likelihood, particularly as the smaller holdings would have greatly increased debt servicing burdens if taken on by individuals as separate units.

7.5

LENGTH OF TIME IN CONTROL OF FARM

Under 5 years	22	27%
5-15 years	25	30%
15-30 years	24	29%
30-45 years	12	14%
Total	83	

COMMENT

7.5.1

There has been a significant turnover of farms during the past five years.

7.5.2

Of the 22 farmers that have been in control under 5 years, 9 have taken over from parents.

7.5.3

From the findings, no definite link can be established between the length of tenure and the effectiveness of the farmer.

7.6

LENGTH OF TIME FARMS HAVE BEEN IN FAMILY

Under 20 years	2	5%
20-40 years	12	30%
40-60 years	12	30%
Over 60 years	14	35%
Total	40	

COMMENT

7.6.1

This survey includes only properties that have changed ownership within a family at least once. As indicated, 40 of the 83, or 48% of holdings in the study area fall into this category.

This figure may well be higher than that in other more accessible and affluent farming areas of New Zealand.

7.6.2

As with the variance of effectiveness under section 7.5.3, no meaningful relationship between the length of time a farm has been in the family and the manner in which it is farmed can be traced.

7.6.3

There is a slight link between the length of time families have lived in the various districts, and their amount of community involvement, e.g. participation on local committees, county councillors, etc.

7.7

FARMS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED IN SIZE SINCE 1945

Of 83 farms, 33 have increased in size notably since 1945, a total of 40%. This figure includes some properties that have been joined with more than one other block.

COMMENT

7.7.1

Of the 33 merged units, 3 at present employ single labour (excluding Government Land Development Blocks) and a further 9 have significant help from members of the family.

None of the 33 employ a married labour unit.

7.7.2

The number of mergers since 1945 has been more pronounced west of the Whangamomona Saddle, with 16 of the 34 units in that area (47%) merged, compared with 17 from 49 (35%) east of the saddle.

This however, does not take into account multiple mergers.

7.7.3

Again, there is considerable variance in the noticeable productivity from merged farms, compared with previous levels and average district levels.

General observation is that while overall productivity has not necessarily increased following amalgamation, the viability of the individual farmer may have improved, and with recent upward movements in land values, equities have improved.

7.7.4

The merging of farm properties since 1945 has greatly contributed to the number of empty houses in the area, as few labour units were replaced.

This in turn has resulted in fewer permanent families in the study area.

7.8

LABOUR EMPLOYED ON FARMS

Permanent Married -	3
Permanent Single -	6
Family labour	15
(excluding spouse)	
Managers	4

COMMENT

7.8.1

A very small number of permanent married staff and managers, most of which are employed on Government Development Blocks, is a feature.

As confirmed in the Postal Survey, this reflects the difficulty of attracting and retaining labour to the area because of remoteness, lack of dual-income family opportunities, lack of services etc.

7.8.2

Approximately 80% of farms within the study area employed no permanent labour outside the family unit, though on such units casual labour is employed on occasions, depending on development and maintenance finance available.

7.9

FARM HOMESTEADS AGE

Under 20 years	22	27%
20-50 years	31	37%
Over 50 years	24	29%
Farms without homesteads	6	7%
Total	83	

COMMENT

7.9.1

The number of houses over 50 years old was markedly higher in percentage east of the Whangamomona saddle, further from Stratford. 39% were over 50 years old east of the saddle, compared to only 19% westwards.

This would indicate higher building costs directly related to the distance from a service centre, and to a lesser extent earlier replacement of older houses in the earlier settled area west of the saddle.

7.9.2

Although over 50 years old, some residences have been and are still being renovated and maintained to provide a reasonable standard of comfort.

Almost all dwellings are of wooden construction, and as there are no organised fire-fighting services within the riding, they are more susceptible to total fire destruction, particularly in the eastern sector.

7.10

CONDITION OF FARM HOMESTEADS AND SURROUNDS

Attractive -	6	8%
Neat -	40	52%
Plain -	27	35%
Untidy -	4	5%
Total	77	

COMMENT

7.10.1

These observations were gauged with every attempt to relate each homestead to similar standards, and took into account upkeep of the building, grounds, gardens, aesthetic attributes, etc.

7.10.2

The general observation was a lack of aesthetically distinctive homesteads, compared with other older established and more affluent rural areas of New Zealand.

This to some degree would reflect the more acute fluctuation of farming and social fortunes affecting the area, again compared to other districts.

7.11

SURPLUS HOMES ON FARMS

Uninhabited 38.

This is made up of 27 east of the saddle and 11 west of the saddle. (Including 3 baches).

Occupied 11 (2 east, 9 west.)

COMMENT

7.11.1

As evidenced by the figures above, the area east of the Whangamomona Saddle further from Stratford has a much greater proportion of habitable empty houses.

7.11.2

These figures do not include those houses empty in villages, which are referred to later in the section on villages.

7.11.3

Including those empty habitable houses in the villages, figures for the portion of the study area between Whangamomona Saddle and Tangarakau Gorge indicate about 2 empty houses for every 3 occupied.

7.11.4

The siting of the empty houses does not necessarily relate to those properties in need of extra permanent farm labour.

7.11.5

There has been no evidence of demand for subdivision of small areas of land with empty houses with a view to sale.

7.11.6

The 11 surplus houses on farms that are occupied house the following people—
2 semi-retired parents of farmers.
7 casual workers including a contractor and forestry worker.
1 farm holiday cottage.
1 mother and family.
As well, two other retired farming families still live in the district on separate small blocks of under 10 hectares.

7.11.7

As maintenance costs on houses are high, particularly further east from the service town, it is likely that several of these houses will become uninhabitable through lack of care and occupation.

7.12
SCOPE FOR INCREASED PRODUCTION ON FARMS

Significant -	35	42%
Reasonable -	21	25%
Very little -	27	33%
Total	83	

COMMENT

7.12.1

Assessment of properties endeavoured to relate production potential to pastoral farming under existing technology. Production increases on individual holdings would tend to come more from land development, under this mode of appraisal.
When postal survey results were assessed later, it became obvious that some properties rated as having very little scope for increased production, had relatively low stocking rates, and could well possibly increase stocking rates without seriously affecting per-stock unit production.

7.12.2

Of the 27 properties listed as having very little scope for increased production, only 2 were located west of the Whangamomona Saddle.
This would indicate much potential to be realised in the more accessible western districts, but also cognizance should be taken of the second paragraph in 7.12.1.

7.12.3

If conducted on an area basis, this aspect of the survey gives a different result, as most of the properties with significant development potential are large in size.
Of the 14 properties over 1000 hectares, all except the Mt Damper Government Development Block were rated as having significant scope for production increases.
Similarly, all the 14 properties between 600 and 1000 hectares were rated as having either significant or reasonable scope for increased production.

7.13
NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN FARM HOMESTEADS

Secondary school -	20
Primary school -	34
Pre-school -	41
Total	95
Farm holdings with children 41 (49%).	
Total children per holding 1.1.	
Average number of children per married family in homestead 95/64 - 1.5.	
Number of unmarried farm owner/occupiers 7.	

COMMENT

7.13.1

Because of difficulty obtaining an accurate count of children in the area not living on farms, these figures have not been included.

7.13.2

A far higher ratio of pre-school children lived in farm homesteads east of the Whangamomona Saddle compared to the west; 32 against 9.

7.13.3

Secondary school pupils were able to bus to Stratford High School from the far western areas of Strathmore, Huiakama and Te Wera, but boarding school or correspondence were the options for others.

7.14
VILLAGES

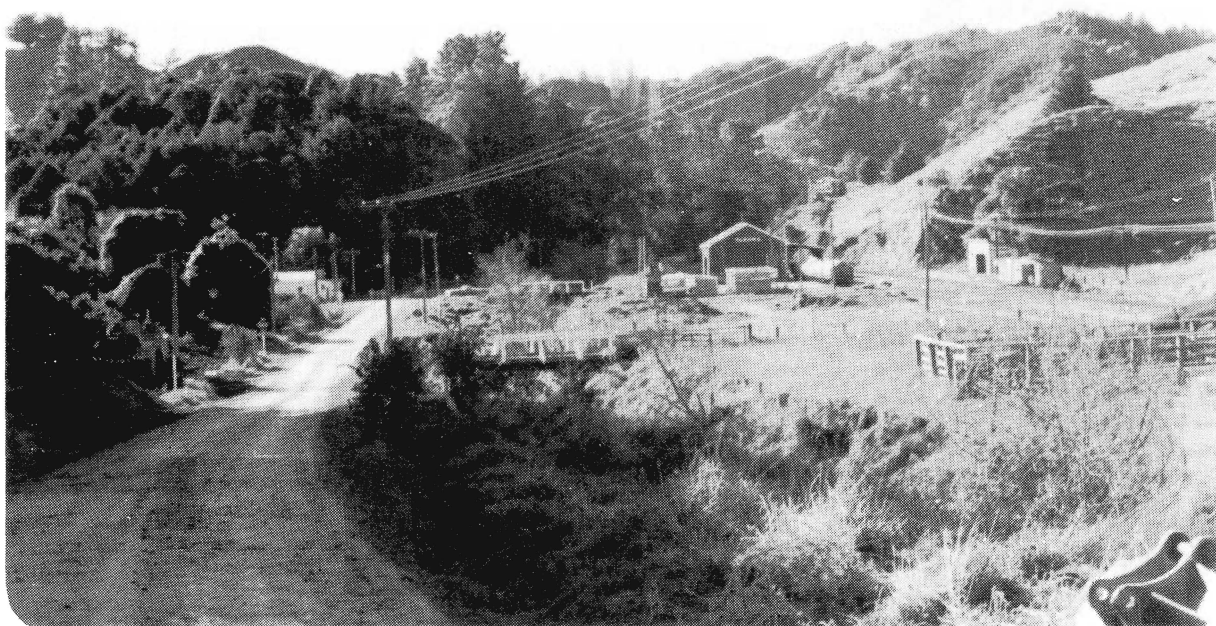
Findings from the General Survey are tabulated in the later section on Social Aspects of the study areas.



Whangamomona Village — 1979



Strathmore Village — 1979



Tahora — 1979



**Whangamomona — Looking down
Whangamomona Road — Stratford County Depot
in foreground — 1979**



**Whangamomona School — Temporarily
closed May 1979**



**Farmland in the study area —
Looking from Tahora Saddle towards
Mt Ruapehu**



**State Highway 43 —
Whangamomona Saddle**



**State Highway 43 — Between Te Wera
and Pohokura**

POSTAL SURVEY
EAST TARANAKI SURVEY — 1979

(Relating to farms in Whangamomona Riding,
Stratford County.)

- 1. Size of farm (or farms) in area.
— State road distance apart in miles if farms are separated.
— area of crown lease (don't include L.I.P.)
— land farmed by owner, manager, absentee owner, leased —
- 2. Area in — (approx.)
native bush
scrub
grass
- 3. Area of — (approx.)
steep hills
easier hills
rolling
flat
- 4. Stock numbers wintered.
Beef cows
Beef weaners
Dairy Cows
Other beef cattle
Replacemen*s
Ewes
Hoggets
Other sheep.
- 5. Permanent labour employed—
(State if member of family)
- 6. If no permanent labour employed, tick the reason(s) why not —
 - a) No need for extra labour.
 - b) Accommodation too expensive to provide.
 - c) Labour hard to get and retain.
 - d) Cannot afford labour.
 - e) Extra cost and supervision not worthwhile.
 - f) Labour won't stay in the area because of
 - remoteness
 - lack of services
 - no income for wife.
- 7. Main reasons for not increasing production - if applicable.
 - a) Labour shortage.
 - b) Shortage of development finance.
 - c) Taxation system.
 - d) Uncertain future of returns.
 - e) Other reasons (state).
- 8. Approximate number of trips to Stratford and further afield by family car per month.
- 9. Use of local store
 - frequently
 - occasionally
 - never.

- 10. Use of the railway —
 - a) Livestock
 - frequently
 - occasionally
 - never
 - b) Fertiliser
 - frequently
 - occasionally
 - never
 - c) Freight
 - frequently
 - occasionally
 - never
 - d) Passenger travel
 - frequently
 - occasionally
 - never.
- 11. If you use the railways infrequently, tick the reason(s) below—
 - a) Inconvenience
 - b) Cost
 - c) Unreliable service
 - d) Others (state).
- 12. Would you use the train unit more or less if it travelled the opposite way - towards N.P. in the morning and Taumarunui in evening —
 - more suitable
 - less suitable
 - don't care.
- 13. Distance in miles from nearest primary school.
- 14. Any further comments on the main problems of your area, if they exist, affecting farm production and social conditions.
- 15. Any predictions of farming and social trends in your district in the next twenty years?

9.0
POSTAL SURVEY RESULTS

(Based on replies from 45 of 83 farms - 54%)

9.1
SIZE OF FARM

Over	600-	300-	200-	100-	Under
1000	1000	600	300	200	100
Ha.	Ha.	Ha.	Ha.	Ha.	Ha.
6	11	14	8	4	2
13%	24%	32%	18%	9%	4%

(Total area covered by postal survey was
27203 Ha.)

COMMENT
9.1.1

The spread of farm sizes in the postal shows similarity to that of the general survey see page 20.
Most response to the postal survey came from farms in the 600-1000 Ha. range, and least from those ranging from 100-200 Ha., and those over 1000 Ha.

9.1.2

Average farm size in the postal survey is 605 Ha., compared with 633 Ha. in the general survey figures taken from the Valuation Rolls.

9.1.3

10 of the 45 farms had run-offs or adjacent units. 2 farms had more than 1 run-off.

1 farm had another unit 10 miles distant, and 2 farms one 5 miles from the base farm. The other 7 varied between ½ and 5 miles.

4 of the 45 farms reported farming crown land, or areas of crown land, disregarding L.I.P.

9.1.4

Replies to the postal survey included—

39 owner-farmers

3 farm managers

3 absentee owners

This represents representative responses from owner-farmers and farm managers, but a poor response from absentee owners. (See Page 7)

9.2

VEGETATION COVER

Area in bush —	4898 Ha.	18%
Area in scrub —	5905 Ha.	22%
Area in grass —	16441 Ha.	60%

COMMENT

9.2.1

Total farm area covered by the postal survey was 27254 Ha., 52% of that included in the general survey, and almost exactly one quarter the land area of the whole Whangamomona Riding.

On this basis, approximately 29% of the study area is in grass; this area estimated at 31680 Ha., would carry around 280,000 stock units if the average stocking rate in the postal survey of 8.9 l.s.u. per hectare is used as guide. (See 9.4).

9.2.2

Based on the postal survey, the total area of reverted scrub on all occupied holdings in the riding would be approximately 11400 Ha.

This figure does not include other areas of reverted scrubland in the total study area.

9.3

TOPOGRAPHY

Area of steep hills —	16058 Ha.	59%
Area of easier hills —	7789 Ha.	29%
Area of rolling hills —	2549 Ha.	9%
Area of flats —	910 Ha.	3%

COMMENT

9.3.1

Stocking rates on properties with higher proportions of flat and rolling hills were generally slightly higher, but not significantly so.

This is partly explained by stock not being run on some areas of the steep hills covered with bush or scrub.

9.3.2

The small total percentage of flat and rolling land limits the diversification of land use possible, and the ability of farmers to finish off stock to any marked degree.

9.4

STOCK NUMBERS

Sheep livestock units — 89430 (61%)

Cattle livestock units — 57145 (39%)

Total livestock units — 146575

Average l.s.u./ Ha. grass — 8.9 (3.6/acre)

9.4.1

A breakdown of livestock numbers carried on farms in groups is as follows—

Under 1500	1500-3000	3000-4500	4500-6000	Over 6000
6	16	14	6	3
13%	36%	31%	13%	7%

COMMENT

9.4.2

The average farm carried 3260 stock units, comprising 1988 sheep units and 1272 cattle units.

This farm of 605 Ha. had 365 Ha. of grass, 133 in scrub and 109 Ha. in bush.

9.4.3

The average farm size and stocking rate will be altered slightly if the Mt Damper Government Land Development Block is excluded, as the area is larger than average, and stocking rate higher.

9.4.4

There is no distinct pattern of stocking rate between farms of differing total numbers carried. However a relationship exists between smaller properties and a higher stocking rate.

9.4.5

The variance of sheep/cattle stocking ratios ranged from 85% sheep / 15% cattle through to 39% sheep / 61% cattle.

5 of the 45 surveyed farms had higher cattle to sheep stock unit numbers, including one dairy farm and a small unit running some dairy beef bulls.

Most of those farms with a higher percentage of beef stock units carried beef cattle herds. The great majority of farms had breeding herds and flocks.

PERMANENT LABOUR EMPLOYED

- Respondents listing permanent labour were —
- 2 Land and Survey Blocks — 4 and 2 units
 - 2 farms with permanent single employees.
 - 3 farms employing sons full time.
 - 1 farmer employing other family labour.
 - 3 farmers listed wives as permanent employees.

COMMENT

9.5.1

From the small number of farms listed employing outside permanent labour, it is clear that the vast majority of farms rely on the farmer and his family for permanent labour.

9.5.2

The figures tend to support comments from respondents that stable permanent farm labour is difficult to attract and retain in the area.

REASONS FOR NOT EMPLOYING PERMANENT LABOUR

- 36 of the 45 respondents replied to this question, a number similar to those not employing labour.
- 11 of the 36 recorded no need for extra labour. The remaining 25 listed their reasons as follows — some indicated more than one reason.
- b) Accommodation too expensive to provide - 4
 - c) Labour hard to get and retain - 9
 - d) Cannot afford extra labour - 11
 - e) Extra cost and supervision not worthwhile - 9
 - f) Labour won't stay in area because of remoteness, lack of services, no income for wife - 12

COMMENT

9.6.1

25 of 45 in the postal survey suggested that they could well need more permanent labour, but because of various factors did not or would not employ extra staff.

This tends to suggest that successful employment of permanent labour could help realise higher farm production and development.

However because of other points brought out by the surveys, it appears that farm ownership is a strong motivating factor in holding and attracting families to this area, and that without this inducement it may still be difficult to solve the permanent labour problems.

9.7

MAIN REASONS FOR NOT INCREASING PRODUCTION

20 of 45 answered this question, aimed towards those not increasing production.

It is also quite likely that several of the remaining 25 farms have scope for a greater rate of production increase than taking place currently.

- Reasons listed for not increasing production were as follows: — some farmers listed more than one —
- a) Labour shortage - 5
 - b) Shortage of development finance - 3
 - c) Taxation system - 13
 - d) Uncertain future of returns - 5
 - e) Other reasons - none given.

COMMENT

9.7.1

65% of those answering this question regarded the taxation system their main reason for not increasing production.

Though no more specific aspect of the taxation system was questioned, general comment in some of the postal surveys suggested a diminishing net unit return to farmers for increased production.

9.8

NUMBER OF TRIPS TO STRATFORD AND FURTHER AFIELD BY FAMILY CAR PER MONTH

- The average from 45 replies was 3½ per month. The replies varied from 1 trip every two months (1), 1 trip a month (8) and through to 15 trips per month, with 3 over 10 per month.

COMMENT

9.8.1

Though it was not possible to relate replies to their distance from Stratford, comments pointed towards fewer trips for those living east in the riding.

Further comments in the survey suggested that some families are being compelled to reduce these outings as car running costs soar.

9.9

USE OF LOCAL STORE

Frequently	27	60%
Occasionally	11	24%
Never	7	16%

COMMENT

9.9.1

Some of those in the study area have no local store, including the Makahu and Whangamomona districts.

9.9.2

The stores at Te Wera, Kohuratahi and Tahora all are connected with delivery of mail, or sorting of mail, milk, bread, newspaper and school bus runs in varying degrees. At least one store has been kept open by local financial backing.

9.10 USE OF N.Z.R

a) Livestock	Nil	
Frequently		
Occasionally	5	11%
Never	40	89%

Comments from farmers indicated that there were little if any remaining livestock facilities for transport of stock by rail.

b) Fertiliser		
Frequently	19	42%
Occasionally	12	27%
Never	14	31%

Some farmers on papa country or reverted land said they used little fertiliser.

Road transport restrictions may also have some influence on the amount of fertiliser carried by rail.

c) Freight		
Frequently	3	7%
Occasionally	27	60%
Never	15	33%

It was not possible to gauge the full extend to which farmers used railways for freight cartage, but comments under Q. 11 suggest there is more scope for use of this service.

d) Passenger Travel		
Frequently	1	2%
Occasionally	29	65%
Never	15	33%

Results confirm the reliance families farming in the study area place on private road transport for travel.

Comments on Q. 12 give some indication on why the passenger service is not used frequently.

9.11 REASONS FOR USING RAILWAYS INFREQUENTLY

33 of the 45 replied, suggesting that the other 12 used the facilities frequently, or perhaps lived in the Makahu or Strathmore districts, further from a railhead.

Replies were: (some listed more than one reason)

a) Inconvenience	19
b) Cost	3
c) Unreliable Service	20
d) Others	None stated.

COMMENT

9.11.1

Some of those respondents listing inconvenience did so in comparison with their own private transport.

9.11.2

As unreliable service was rated by 61% of those replying as being a reason for using the railways infrequently, it is obviously a far greater factor than cost, which rated only in 9% of answers.

(See also comments on Railway under Social section - 10.3 — Page 22).

9.12 VIEWS ON TRAIN UNIT SERVICE BETWEEN NEW PLYMOUTH AND TAUMARUNUI

All 45 replied to this question, asking whether the respondent would use the train unit more if it travelled the opposite way — i.e. towards New Plymouth in the morning and Taumarunui in the evening.

Answers were:—

Taumarunui — New Plymouth in morning more suitable 28 - 62%.

New Plymouth — Taumarunui in morning more suitable (present service) 5 - 11%.

Don't care 12 - 27%.

COMMENT

9.12.1

A number of those replying 'don't care' stated they lived away from a handy railway station - presumably in Makahu or Strathmore district.

9.12.2

Of those stating a preference, 85% said they would use the train unit more if it ran the opposite direction, while 15% favoured the present timetable.

9.13 DISTANCE IN MILES FROM NEAREST PRIMARY SCHOOL

The average from 45 replies was 5 miles, or 8 km.

Longest distance was 15 miles, with six replies over ten miles.

COMMENT

9.13.1

The efficient running of a school bus service is essential to the area, and will become more so if some of the more remote parts of the riding are developed into productivity and settled — for instance the Aotuhia district.

9.14 COMMENTS ON THE MAIN PROBLEMS OF THE AREA, IF THEY EXIST, AFFECTING FARM PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

34 of the 45 replies to the postal survey responded to this Question 14, and Question 15, dealing with the future.

Some replies listed more than one factor. The tabulated list of problems reported is as follows —

Roading was by far the most common answer, listed by 26.

Lack of people was suggested by 15, some of whom listed such reasons as —

- lack of services
- no income for wives
- land aggregation
- no intellectual stimulation

9.10
USE OF N.Z.R

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REASONS FOR USING RAILWAYS
INFREQUENTLY

33 of the 45 replied, suggesting that the other 12 used the facilities frequently, or perhaps lived in the Makahu or Strathmore districts, further from a railhead.

Replies were: (some listed more than one reason)

a) Inconvenience	19
b) Cost	3
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d) Others	None stated.

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COMMENTS ON THE MAIN PROBLEMS
OF THE AREA, IF THEY EXIST,
AFFECTING FARM PRODUCTION AND
SOCIAL CONDITIONS

34 of the 45 replies to the postal survey responded to this Question 14, and Question 15, dealing with the future.

Some replies listed more than one factor. The tabulated list of problems reported is as follows —

Roading was by far the most common answer, listed by 26.

Lack of people was suggested by 15, some of whom listed such reasons as —

- lack of services
- no income for wives
- land aggregation
- no intellectual stimulation

Under this mention of **Lack of People**, suggestions were made recommending prompt re-settlement of the Mt Damper Government Development Block, the re-development and eventual settlement of Aotuhia district - (some felt Aotuhia should be serviced through the Whangamomona district; another comment urged that private interests be allowed to develop Aotuhia if the Government did not do so.)

Other factors listed included tax structure (2), and more specifically in relation to farm production, the high level of freight and general farming costs (10) and lack of casual labour (1).

COMMENT

9.14.1

Above all, **poor roading** was rated as the major factor in affecting farm production and social conditions.

9.15

PREDICTIONS OF FARMING AND SOCIAL TRENDS IN THE DISTRICT IN THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS

Although naturally a range of predictions came forward, **more farm mergers** were named by 70% of those replying to this section.

Most of the comments on farm mergers hinted at condemnation of this trend. Some of these comments are listed on the following pages.

Next most consistent forecast was that of the increasing effect of oil price hikes, affecting farming and living costs, but possibly fostering more social life within districts.

Other comments on the future included —

—social life nil

—further depopulation

—orcharding on flat valleys

—the whole area will be six farms

Some optimism came forth, however, as indicated—

—farming in the area will improve

—a reversal of present social trends, hopefully

—a local revival of communities

—farming will become more viable.

Population must decline as a result of above, reducing social standards even further.

Production must fall off because of bigger areas and fewer workers. To provide education and a decent standard of family life, farmers will move to town and thus further aggravate the position by farming from a distance . . .

3) "The main problem facing increased farm production is that the land is being farmed more extensively. It is cheaper to buy out the neighbour and run things a little easier than try and farm the original block more intensively . . .

9.15.1

Excerpts from replies to Question 14 with reference to roading conditions appear under the Social section — 10.2 on Page 20.

9.15.2

The following are some of the individual replies to the Question 15, dealing with the future of the area.

1) "Isolation becomes more and more of a problem as the economics of farming tend to drive more properties into amalgamation. It is a trend that cannot help the country in the long term as in the main, production per acre falls when larger properties are farmed. The oil crisis will ultimately help to accelerate this by increasing costs in the back country to the stage that presumably in time Whangamomona will be farmed not very efficiently by half a dozen or so graziers."

2) "Areas must be bigger to absorb increased costs due to inflation etc . . .

e.g. 1950 economic unit - 600 ewes (rehab)

1979 economic unit - ?

1990 economic unit - !!!

If some way could be found to make 500 acres produce a comfortable living without ever having to own more land, then eventually the trend may reverse itself and farm acreages will begin to decrease, with the resulting increase in population.

At the moment I can't see any reason why the trend will not continue as it has, with larger farms, fewer people and a further erosion of social life and services . . ."

4) "If present trends continue, all land will be farmed by absentee owners . . ."

5) "Amalgamation of farms is the worst possible thing to happen in a small country area . . ."

6) "Open up Aotuhia and settle Mt Damper . . . Settling young people onto the land is the best incentive for the back country. . ."

7) "There could possibly be a great deal of land amalgamation by local farmers - socially detrimental - decline in productivity as one man can only manage a certain amount of land successfully.

We believe the area has a terrific potential for increased production (primary) if only the right people (with ability and sound farming knowledge) are encouraged.

There are a great many acres that are just being grazed not farmed but how that problem is overcome we do not know. One cannot force a farmer to give up his land.

Perhaps the government could involve itself in more land development - not so intensive as the Mangawhata and Mangapapa (Kohuratahi and Mt Damper) blocks . . . Maybe decent boundary and some internal fences, good buildings and access.

With this, plus money for further development, an energetic young farmer should progress."

8) "If the governments keep making bigger farms to be economic, there will be that few people left, what few services are left will disappear, then the last farmers will leave for the cities, and the government can then plant it in trees, and the land will be back where it was 100 years ago."

9) "Cost of land, cost of development, discouraging people from settling in the back country, will have serious consequences.

One can envisage more schools, stores etc., closing - a major disincentive for farming families.

Expect to see more takeovers and farms run by bachelors or managers.”

10) “Farms may well improve, but probably get bigger, run by managers or owners from town. Socially most clubs etc., will die out, and those who require social activities will have to travel to town.

Or maybe, within twenty years the potential of hill country will be recognised and the rebuilding and expansion will require people and the good country life will start all over again.”

COMMENT ON Q.15

9.15.3

From the replies to this question on future trends, it is obvious that many farmers at present in the study area are concerned about the social and agricultural future of the riding.

Above all, future mergers of farming units were singled out as having possible adverse effects on both facets - socially and farming.

10.0
SOCIAL ASPECTS OF STUDY AREA

10.1
POPULATION

Census population figures for the Whangamomona Riding since merger with the Stratford County in 1955 are as follows — (also refer to graph)

Census Year	Total Population
1956	845
1961	869
1966	712
1971	552
1976	458

An estimate for 1979 based on these surveys is 380.

The following are the comparable figures for the Stratford County during the same period, and figures for the area of the Stratford County outside the Whangamomona Riding.

Census Year	Total Stratford County	Strfd County less Whanga.
1956	6216	5374
1961	6027	5158
1966	5655	4943
1971	5298	4746
1976	5084	4626

Note — July 1979 Government provisional population figures for Stratford County were 4850, a further drop of 234.

As can be seen, the population decline in the Whangamomona Riding from 1961 to 1976 has been at a far greater rate than that of the remainder of the Stratford County; a 47% decline in the Whangamomona Riding compared to 10% for the remainder of the Stratford County.

It is quite likely that if figures from the other ‘back country’ ridings of the Stratford County, Ngatimaru and Mangaehu, were taken account of, the population losses during this period would vary even more between the eastern hill country, and the western flatter land.

Peak population recorded in the study area was in 1911, the first census year after the formation of the Whangamomona County, when the figure was 1615.

This included 82 for the township of Strathmore, and while Whangamomona village was not listed, estimates of its population are from 100 to 200.

This figure of 1615 would have been lower than that during the first decade of the 1900s. It is also possible a higher figure would have been recorded in 1931 had a census been taken when the railway town of Tangarakau was thriving.

From the graph it can be clearly seen that there are two distinct periods of a noticeable decline in population — 1936 to 1945, and more recently 1966 to 1979.

As mentioned, a decline also took place from 1901 to 1916.

Main reasons for the three periods of decline are—

a) 1901 to 1916 — This period saw the decrease in workforce numbers in the area associated with sawmilling, road and railways development, land development, and later the exodus of men to World War One.

b) 1936 to 1945 — The sharp 35% decline in population during these nine years reflected the effects of the 1929-35 depression, after which land was abandoned. Manpower loss to World War Two also contributed to some extent.

c) 1966 to 1979 — This slide in numbers coincided with economic farming difficulties due to the 1966 drop in wool prices, which led to merging of some farm units.

Other factors included a tendency towards smaller families, a loss of people associated with services — policeman, district nurse, etc., - and less non-farming workforces due to mechanisation and centralisation.

Since 1960, N.Z.E.D. employees have left the area, workforce numbers for the Stratford County and N.Z. Railways have decreased, and the N.Z. Forest Service Camp at Te Wera has closed, as the main body of workers travel daily from Stratford.

10.2
ROADING

The study area is serviced by State Highway 43 which runs for approximately 60 km from Strathmore on the western border of the riding to the Tangarakau Gorge, and then on to link with Ohura, about 30 km from the gorge, and Taumarunui, about 65 km distant. (See map Page 4).

In turn the highway is fed by either loop or no-exit roads servicing farmed areas.

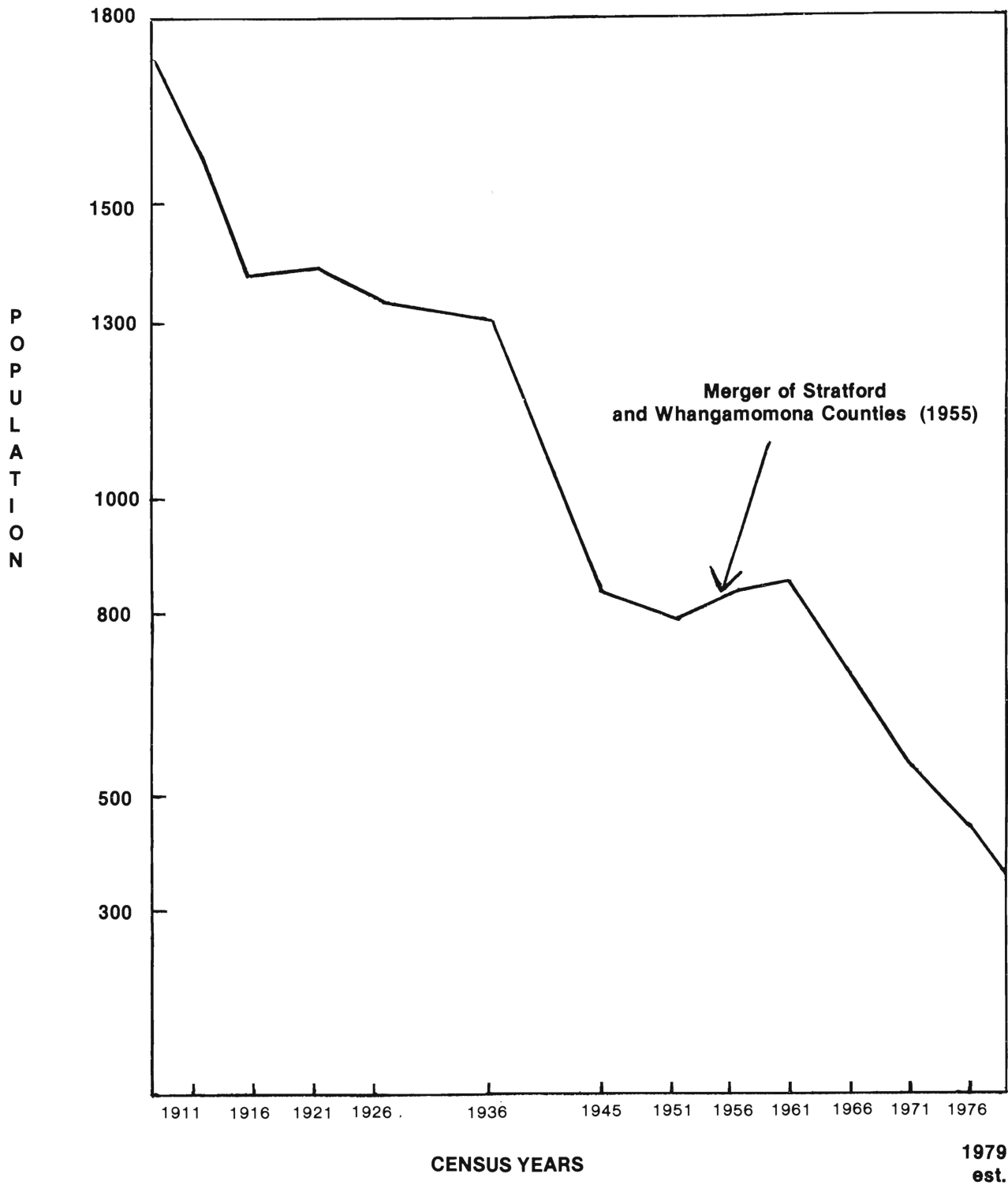
S.H. 43 through the study area is generally narrow, winding and slow travelling, crossing four saddles.

The lengths from Strathmore to the western foot of the Whangamomona Saddle, and from Whangamomona village to just west of the Tahora Saddle have been sealed over the last 25 years, though little of this was done during the last decade.

10.1.1

POPULATION OF WHANGAMOMONA RIDING

1908 — 1979



The highway is inferior by modern roading standards, and a deterrent both to population settlement and agricultural development.

The side roads are largely unsealed, maintenance costs are high because of a lack of metal in the area, the high rainfall (around 200 cm per year) and isolation from roading staff.

Several kilometres of formed clay roads and tracks leading from side roads service some farming areas that have been 'walked off.' Some of these blocks are grazed by absentee owners or lessees, mainly those with base farms in the area.

10.2.1

Roading in the Whangamomona riding was the subject of special report following an investigation by the National Roads Board Investigation Team in 1970.

The report said the Team was 'of the opinion that present roading in Whangamomona is not adequate, and that an injection of extra funds is needed to bring access up to what would be regarded as a minimal standard in most other areas.' (Page 5).

This state of roading existed despite special assistance from N.R.B. funds amounting to \$194,000 for roading rehabilitation and \$120,000 for bridge renewals between 1955 and 1965, following the merger of the Stratford and Whangamomona Counties.

In addition S.H. 43 has been inspected over the years by National Roads Board members and officials, in response to requests for improvements from local residents, the Stratford County Council, which assumes responsibility for the control of this delegated provincial highway, and other interested bodies such as Federated Farmers.

A special visit of the N.R.B. in January 1974 led by the Hon. H. Watt, Minister of Works in the Labour Government, and Chairman of the N.R.B., resulted in reports indicating optimism that major roading improvements to the highway would take place.

However, apart from upgrading several bridges and altering the classification from Class III to Class II, little as yet has been done to significantly improve the route.

The July 1979 visit of the N.R.B. to Taranaki featured renewed pleas for upgrading S.H. 43, from Taranaki Federated Farmers, the Taranaki Regional Development Council, the Stratford Progressive Association, and the Stratford County Council.

10.2.3

Local farmers in the study area in response to the postal survey listed roading problems above all other factors affecting farm production and social conditions in the area.

The following few replies are listed, in response to the question —

'Any further comments on the main problems of your area, if they exist, affecting farm production and social conditions.'

i) 'That six miles of metal hill (Whanga Saddle) in so many ways dampens the whole aspect of living

out here, now, in our present national socio-economic situation. If left in its present form it will be the straw to break the camel's back for younger people out here. If it was sealed, and some corners blown off, to many living out here, 'farming on' would be more bearable.'

ii) 'Biggest problem being shocking state of S.H. 43, everlasting pot holes and corrugations, on metal stretches, being murder on vehicles. The cost of maintaining these vehicles almost doubled in the last twelve months. This meaning working people coming into the back country, almost nil.'

iii) 'The heavy maintenance on stock transport vehicles and private cars due to the poor conditions on the metalled sections of State Highway 43 . . . The ever increasing transport costs will have a very big influence on the future farmers and householders of this district.'

iv) 'I feel the main problem is the upgrading of State Highway 43 beyond the Pohokura Saddle. My main reason for saying so is this — That I envisage the Stratford - Ohura Highway to be a most important route either way. This would open up thousands of acres or hectares. In other words it would be an inducement for young couples to move out to the back country.'

10.3

RAILWAY

As indicated in the response to questions on the railway in the postal survey, the presence of the Stratford — Okahukura railway line in the study area has less impact than could be expected, and certainly less now than after it first reached the districts between 1910 and 1920.

10.3.1

Livestock transporting by rail has gradually been phased out over the last 20 years, due partly to farmers opting for quicker road transport eliminating double-handling.

Reports from farmers and stock firms indicate experiences of unreliable service from N.Z.R. in the past deterring greater use of rail for livestock transport.

10.3.2

Parcel and freight transport by rail is used less as supplies are carried by road transporters, stock firms and settlers.

Rail transport still carries newspapers, some bread, milk and requisites for local stores.

Fertiliser is still transported by rail for the majority of farms in the eastern area.

10.3.3

Passenger transport needs of the district would be far better served if the existing train unit were to run towards Stratford and New Plymouth in the morning, and return to Taumarunui in the evening, not vice-versa, as at present. (See postal survey results, 9.12 - Page 18.)

Although a small number of residents in the east of the riding travel to Taumarunui as a service centre by rail, the district as a whole has far greater affiliation with the Stratford centre.

10.3.4

The Stratford County Council has investigated more than once in recent years the feasibility of transporting metal for roading into the area by rail.

This would obviate much road damage done by heavy vehicles transporting metal; as well the trucks constitute a traffic hazard on the narrow highway.

To date this scheme has not been adopted because of high comparative rail cartage costs, and the additional problems and cost of double-handling.

If ballast railway trucks were used to dump at suitable sites, this mode of metal cartage could be reconsidered.

10.3.5

The recent and continuing sharp increases in vehicle and fuel costs may mean in future years that a competitive and efficient rail passenger and freight service could play an increasingly important part towards the development and re-population of the area, particularly east of the Whangamomona Saddle.

10.4

EDUCATION

Primary schools in the area are located at Makahu (roll - 23), Huiakama (29), Marco (25) and Tahora (16).

The Whangamomona school was temporarily closed in May 1979, and its roll of about seven bussed to Marco School.

This compares with a roll of 62 in the Whangamomona School in 1962, while in 1958 56 children attended Marco School.

Each of the four schools is served by a bus; the furthest distance travelled by pupils is over 20 kilometres to the Huiakama School from the Pohokura area.

The original Whangamomona County had at least 10 primary schools. Closures since 1950 have been Pohokura (mid-1960s) and Whangamomona (closed temporarily 1979).

Pupils attending both the Huiakama and Makahu schools also reside in adjacent areas outside the Whangamomona Riding.

Secondary schooling is restricted to boarding school, apart from those in the Huiakama-Strathmore -Te Wera district, some of whom travel to Stratford High School by bus, a distance of at least 30 km.

There is no formal pre-school education in the study area, such as playcentre or kindergarten.

The reluctance of families with school-age children to settle in the eastern part of the riding can be seen by the low number of married farm workers employed, and the low number of families with school children in Whangamomona village.

Of the five Stratford County Council and three N.Z.R. workmen in Whangamomona, one family only has children attending primary school.

10.5

VILLAGES

Villages and community focal points in the study area are as follows - (see map page 4).

10.5.1

WHANGAMOMONA

(See photos)

Main buildings are —

Hotel (converted to tavern 1975)

Motor Garage (no petrol sales)

Hall

Two churches

Swimming baths (In grounds of temporarily closed school)

Stratford County Depot

Domain

Transport Firm (two trucks)

Railway station

Telephone exchange and P.O.

Cemetery (no recent burials there)

Residents in the village included —

Stratford County — foreman and 4 others.

N.Z.R. - 3 workmen.

Garage proprietor (working part-time for Stratford County)

Publican

Transport Operator

Postmistress

2 casual workers

1 retired man

Approximately five habitable houses are empty. Two local farmers live in or near the village.

Recent closures include a store (1967), butcher shop (1970), police station (1970), district nurse (circa 1969) and school (1979).

10.5.2

KOHURATAHI

Store

School (Marco)

Hall

Saleyards

Railway station

Residents include —

Schoolteacher

Storekeeper.

10.5.3

TAHORA

(See photo)

Store

School

Railway station

Hall

Tennis courts (run down)

Domain (scenic reserve)

Residents include —

Contractor

Storekeeper

Pest Board Operator

Transport Operator (Partnership with

Whangamomona Operator)

Schoolteacher

N.Z.R. workers (2 or 3)

10.5.4

TE WERA

Store
Railway Station (N.Z.R. house empty)
Residents include —
Storekeeper.

10.5.5

MAKAHU

School
Hall
Residents include —
Schoolteacher.

10.5.6

STRATHMORE

(See photo)
Hall
Telephone exchange
Church
County sub-depot
Taranaki Electric Power Board sub-station.
Residents include —
Stratford County workman
Local farmer
Local farmer's son (in T.E.P.B. house)
Schoolteacher (Huiakama School nearby)
Note - only part of the Strathmore village lies in the Whangamomona Riding.

10.6

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN STUDY AREA

Tahora School Committee
Tahora Hall Committee
Tahora Community Club
Tahora Tennis Club
Tahora Badminton Club
Tahora Folk Club

Kohuratahi Hall Committee
Kohuratahi Badminton Club
Marco School Committee
Kohuratahi Federated Farmers
Kohuratahi Womens Division of Federated Farmers
Poutu Pony Club

Whangamomona Hall Committee
Whangamomona Rugby Club
Whangamomona Domain Board
Whangamomona Dog Trial Association
Makahu School Committee
Makahu Hall Committee
Makahu Pony Club
Makahu Womens Division of Federated Farmers

Strathmore Golf Club
Strathmore Hall Committee
Strathmore Badminton Club
Strathmore Rugby Club (no competition team)

Strathmore Farewell Committee
Strathmore Federated Farmers
Strathmore Womens Division of Federated Farmers
Strathmore Bachelor Benedicts Committee

Huiakama School Committee

Note — Organisations in the Makahu and Strathmore districts also take in some areas outside the Whangamomona Riding.

10.7

OTHER SERVICES

10.7.1

TELEPHONE

The area east of the Whangamomona saddle is serviced by the Whangamomona Exchange.

Subscribers are on party lines, the service is continuous, and a toll call to Stratford exchange costs a minimum of 36c.

A respondent to the Postal survey mentioned the unreliability of the telephone service.

West of the saddle, residents are serviced by the Strathmore exchange, and have free dialling to Stratford and surrounding areas.

10.7.2

HEALTH

The District Health Nurse was removed from Whangamomona village in about 1969. The main reason advanced by the Health Department at the time for this move was the declining population.

Nearest medical services for most of the area are at Stratford, while emergencies could be transported by helicopter.

10.7.3

LAW AND ORDER

The resident constable at Whangamomona was taken away in 1970, and the police station closed. The police house was then used as a schoolteachers residence.

Reason given for the closure of the police station was that of insufficient workload.

The area is now served from Stratford Police Station, as that part of the study area west of Whangamomona has been in the past.

10.7.4

ELECTRICITY

Electricity reached the west area of the riding in the early 1950s, and Whangamomona village in 1959.

Power has been reticulated to virtually all homesteads in the riding.

10.7.5

TRADESMEN SERVICES

Difficulties are experienced attracting electricians, plumbers, carpenters, farm machinery servicesmen, etc., to the eastern parts of the riding in particular.

The extra costs in time and travelling charges are considerable, and accentuated by recent vehicle running costs.

Accepted benefits of veterinary services, for instance, in districts closer to a service centre, are of limited value further east in the study area because of travelling costs.

10.8

COMMENT OF SOCIAL ASPECTS

The last twenty years has seen a decline in the area of several social services in relation to other more populous districts.

This has coincided with and no doubt been largely due to the 60% drop in population during that time.

Recent steep increases in transport costs are placing a further burden on those residents distant from a service centre.

From comments in the postal survey replies, these trends are affecting the morale of many people living in the area, perhaps typified by one farmer's words — "I am afraid that Government agencies have forgotten that N.Z. and particularly the back country, are people and not a balance sheet."

11.0

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

11.1

AGRICULTURE

11.1.1

The "average farm" in the study area is —

Size: 605 Ha.

Area in grass: 363 Ha.

Area in scrub: 133 Ha.

Area in bush: 109 Ha.

Stock units: 3260

Units per grass Ha: 8.98

Cattle stock units: 1272

Sheep stock units: 1988

Area of steep hills: 357 Ha.

Area of easier hills: 175 Ha.

Area of rolling hills: 55 Ha.

Area of flats: 18 Ha.

11.1.2

The average size of farms continues to increase. The 605 Ha. holding average of the postal survey relates to the 633 Ha. from the general survey.

11.1.3

While stocking rates on average are relatively low, individual properties report much higher stocking levels. Comments indicate stocking rates per hectare and per holding will increase if current incentives and product price/costs ratios continue.

11.1.4

Very few farms hire outside permanent labour. Labour shortages could be inhibiting productivity increases.

11.1.5

Larger farms have more undeveloped land, and are generally less intensively farmed than smaller units.

11.1.6

Considerable potential for increased production exists. Only 29% of the study area is estimated to be in grass, and total area of scrub in the occupied area 11,400 hectares, excluding other areas of reverted scrub in the total riding.

11.1.7

From the surveys it became apparent that no consistent pattern existed between the effectiveness of a farmer, and his age, his time farming the particular property or whether the farm had been owned by his forbears.

11.1.8

There were indications that land was not as effectively farmed by absentee owners, those who spent some time off the farms gaining other income and holdings with poor road access.

11.1.9

Farmers replying to the postal survey rated the taxation system as their main reason for not increasing production.

The main reason given for not employing permanent labour was a combination of remoteness, lack of services and no income for wives in the area.

11.1.10

The future agricultural pattern in the area appears to be linked with pastoral farming — predominantly store farming with breeding ewes and beef herds.

A few hectares of sheltered flats have been planted in kiwifruit this year. There is very little timber planted on individual farms.

11.2

SOCIAL

11.2.1

People living in the riding have dropped in number by 60% since 1961. Less than half the farms have families with children.

11.2.2

Road access, particularly for the eastern part of the riding, is poor by accepted modern standards. The cost of a visit by car to the nearest service town of Stratford would vary from \$15 to \$40 for residents of the area.

11.2.3

The area benefits from and uses rail services far less than could be possible. Most residents replying to the postal survey wished to see the train unit service changed.

11.2.4

There are at least 40 empty habitable houses in the area. For each five holdings, there are two with empty habitable houses.

11.2.5

Existing farm homesteads comprise one-third over fifty years old.

11.2.6

There has been a gradual decline of government and other services over the past 20 years. This has helped dissuade people coming to the area, along with policies of centralisation, lack of dual income opportunities for families and increasing travelling costs.

The motivation of land ownership seems to hold farming families, but little labour outside these families is attracted and retained on a permanent basis.

11.2.7

The settlement of the Government Development Block at Kohuratahi in 1975 had a beneficial effect on the local community with the addition of four farming families.

11.2.8

Those replying to the postal survey listed poor roading as the chief problem affecting farm production and social conditions.

11.2.9

Those replying to the postal survey listed more farm mergers as the most favoured prediction of farming and social trends in the next twenty years. This trend was generally noted as a retrograde one for the district.

11.2.10

From comments and observations, it would seem a definite link exists between social conditions affecting communities, and the realisation of agricultural production potential.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 AGRICULTURE

12.1.1

That full realisation be made of the importance of hill-country farming areas in New Zealand such as the Whangamomona Riding in determining eventual export levels, because of the high percentage of breeding stock carried on such farms.

12.1.2

That continued promotion and review of incentives aimed towards increasing productivity and land development in such areas be maintained — e.g. the livestock incentive scheme and land development encouragement loans.

12.1.3

That in view of the serious effects on farms in the past from drastic price fluctuations, policies be directed towards relatively stable and adequate product prices for this type of farming, and that an adequate share of national resources be directed into hill country farming consistently.

12.1.4

That policies be aimed at increasing the flow of investment into on-farm productivity, as compared to recent farmer preference to investing in additional land, buildings and plant.

12.1.5

That realisation be made of the family-farm unit being the basis of farming and communities in this area, and curbs be put on trends towards absentee-ownership of land, undue aggregation and the pattern of increasing farm sizes that do not necessarily increase productivity.

12.1.6

That Mt Damper Government Development Block be settled as soon as possible.

12.1.7

That the Aotuhia area of reverted land become a Government Land Development Block and be re-settled by family farming units.

12.1.8

That Lands & Survey investigate the possibility of more land in the area being opened up by Land Development programmes, with a view to permanent settlement of capable, motivated farming families.

12.1.9

That an investigation be made on ways to enable under-utilised, large, isolated or fragmented blocks of farmland to be subdivided and re-settled by capable and motivated farmers.

This would ensure more intensive use of the land, as well as enabling existing landowners to channel finance into improving production on a more concentrated and easier managed area of their original unit.

12.1.10

That local and national noxious plants authorities keep a constant watch on the spread and control of hard weeds in the area, particularly barberry, gorse, heather and blackberry, all of which can render large areas of hill country unproductive.

12.2 SOCIAL

12.2.1

That continued representations be made to the National Roads Board, No. 7 District Roads Council and the Stratford County Council on the need to significantly upgrade State Highway 43.

12.2.2

That it be made aware to decision-makers at all levels that if population levels in the area continue to drop at the present rate, the future for the area socially and agriculturally is under severe threat.

12.2.3

That central and local government as employers of rural workforces introduce some means of remote residential allowances to attract and retain staff and population in such areas as this riding, to compensate for the recently evolving dis-incentives as lack of urban services, society's changing attitudes to the dual-income family concept, and sharp cost increases for private transport.

12.2.4

That New Zealand Railways consider a change to the running schedule of the New Plymouth — Taumarunui train unit to cater more for the passenger needs of residents in the area.

12.2.5

That the Housing Corporation & Rural Bank consider flexibility in lending rates to isolated areas, in view of the high number of old homesteads in the area, and the high costs of building in the districts far from service towns.

12.2.6

That decisions by central and local government agencies to terminate services to such areas or reduce staffing numbers not be taken in isolation based on economics, but full consideration be taken of the overall consequences affecting social and agricultural patterns in such remote areas.

12.2.7

That in view of the growing urbanisation of New Zealand society, and the accompanying social and economic consequences, decision-makers at all levels be urged to allocate sufficient resources to strengthen isolated rural communities and hill country farming districts such as the Whangamomona Riding.

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