

Chapter 6

Mystery Creek Preparations

A PERMANENT HOME

Monday, 6th April, 1970

Those attending this Executive Committee meeting of the NZ National Field Days Society (Inc) received reports from several sub-committees on the results and observations at the Second NZ National Field Days, at Te Rapa.

YFC Liaison, Mr Richards, reported that an average of 95 YFC Members had attended to gate control and parking on each day of the Field Days. Members of Hamilton Jaycees had also assisted.

Mr John Scott reported that an estimated 1000 people had visited the three farms, winners of the ICI Farms of the District Awards. Three Farm Advisers, namely F R Duder, J B Murray and R A Rickeys, were to be formerly thanked for their involvement in the Awards.

Mr Duncan Johnstone reported that GKN were keen to have the Farm Fencing Competition run on a national basis.

Cable Price Corporation were commended for making vehicles available for use during the event.

Tuesday, 5th May, 1970

Considerable meeting time was spent on items pertaining to the 'New Property' at Mystery Creek. Hurricane Wire Products had offered to supply fencing products and Vaughan Jones requested several letters be sent, including: to Airport Authority and Waikato Valley Authority re the construction of a proposed bridge on the boundary with the golf course; to Aero Services Tauranga regarding aerial photographs required of the property; to Ministry of Transport re estimated traffic flows for 1971 Field Days; to Golf Club requesting approval for a right-of-way through their land.



The Mystery Creek property from the high bank, looking north-westwards towards the Lochiel Golf Club boundary. Ground development shown includes the Speedway Track (foreground) and the Hamilton Car Club track (middle left). An early toilet block is also visible (middle right).

It is interesting to note that under the meeting heading of 'Honorariums' the following volunteers were nominated to

be presented with CIGARS - Messrs K Holmes, W Holmes, D Kjestrup, and all the Judges.

Tuesday, 21st July, 1970

The Finance Report revealed that an excess income of \$6,000 had resulted from the 1970 Field Days. A sub-committee, to be convened by Mr W Gallagher, was formed to discuss with the Director of the Waikato Museum the possible establishment of a farm machinery museum on the Mystery Creek property, and Mr W Holmes presented an Awards Report which included several recommendations for future Field Days.

Property development was proving to be quite a major part of the financial discussions at each meeting so a specific budget was called for, to be prepared by a special sub-committee.

The idea of a Guest Nation had been mooted for the 1971 Field Days and correspondence had already taken place with the Trade Commissioner of Great Britain but no decision had yet been received.

Monday, 24th August, 1970

A decision was made that the NZ National Field Days Society would lease the 20 acres of land currently leased by the owner of the farm, from the Lochiel Golf Club.

Wednesday, 23rd September, 1970

The Administration Committee reported that it had negotiated the appointments of Mr Vaughan Jones and Mr Laurie Atherfold as Field Days Organisers. Vaughan Jones to be responsible for developing the Mystery Creek property and organising the Field Days and Laurie Atherfold to liaise with Awards and Competition Sub-Committees, sell and allocate exhibitor display sites, and arrange printing, publicity and advertising.

It was resolved that Dr Gordon Edgar be appointed as a second Senior Vice-President and that the Constitution of the Society be updated to provide for this.

Tuesday, 10th November, 1970

It was recommended that the Japanese Embassy, or failing them, the USA Embassy be approached for Guest Nation at the 1972 Field Days.

Exhibitor display sites for the 1971 Field Days to be allocated by ballot but that a limited number of sites be available on a 'permanent' (5-year) basis subject to a set of conditions and payment of a premium fee, over and above the annual site charges, in advance.

Maize and potatoes to be planted on the property for comparative demonstrations.

Monday, 7th December, 1970

Recommendations for eligibility of products for display (anything pertaining to agriculture) were tabled and approved. Vans, station wagons and cars not permitted.

Matters of finance were prominent at this meeting. The ANZ Bank were prepared to advance a sum of money and provide an additional overdraft. Guarantees to be sought from the Society Vice-Presidents.

Vaughan Jones recommended that the building of a house and earth moving on the property should begin as soon as possible.

The NZ Farmer Magazine agreed to sponsor the Practical Aids to Primary Production Awards with separate sections for Machinery and Gadgets.

Tuesday, 2nd February, 1971

A price from Paramount Homes to build a house on the Mystery Creek property was accepted. Cost was \$9,500. A Bank Loan from ANZ of \$62,000 had been secured plus an overdraft of \$7,000. The overdraft was later increased to \$10,000. Todd Motors were recorded in the minutes of the meeting as having donated a tractor for use on the property; a David Brown 990. This donation would be recognised at the Field Days in June. A number of other companies were also preparing to donate equipment to the Society. Earthworks for the internal roading on the site had commenced, and the sites for the proposed Guest Nation Building and property house had been levelled.



Todd Motors donated a tractor

It was noted that Air New Zealand had begun advertising flights from Australia to the 1971 NZ National Field Days.

Tuesday, 23rd March, 1971

Reported that the Methven YFC had conducted the South Island Finals of the Farm Fencing Competition on 20th March, 1971.

Tuesday, 27th April, 1971

Thanks were extended to Mr Laurent for his Chairmanship of the Farm Supervision Sub-Committee and the meeting was advised that Mr Fraser Graham was to take over this position, and that he was currently preparing a stocking programme.

An approach was being made to Hamilton Buses Limited to provide a service from Garden Place, Hamilton, to the Field Days site.

The NZ Automobile Association had agreed to include references to Mystery Creek on their permanent signage.

The Citroen Car Club were given permission to use the property on Queen's Birthday Weekend 1971.

Thursday, 13th May, 1971

Meeting was advised that the construction of the Guest Nation building was almost completed and that final leveling of surrounding area and grass sowing was imminent.

Mr Brian Green had been appointed Farm Manager for the Mystery Creek property.

Tom Hodgson recalls the Construction of the Guest Nation Building at Mystery Creek

Having 'stepped back' from my involvement with the NZ National Field Days Society, it was a pleasant surprise, and honour, some fifteen months later, in late January 1971, to be sent a set of plans by Mr Bernard T Crossley, Consulting Engineer for Interplan Ltd, the same company that had been engaged by the British High Commission to design a unique and striking building for Britain's use as Guest Nation, at the New Zealand National Field Days property, at Mystery Creek, in June, 1971.



The distinctive Guest Nation building at Mystery Creek, designed, paid for and donated to the Society by the first Guest Nation, United Kingdom

As it so often happens, the plans had taken months in the negotiating and preparing, and the builder would only have a few weeks to price and build! The public expectation is that a builder can state a price like a car salesman - no allowance for taking a plan to an Excavator, Blocklayer, Roofer, and 'what-have-you'! "What is taking you so long?" was the cry. I speeded up the whole process by stating provisional amounts for the lesser-subcontractors such as electrician, painter, etc.

I already knew the that the budget was UK£10,000 (NZ\$20,000). Initially the figures added up slightly below budget so I thought I was going to be able to donate the balance! However, I was jolted out of my comfort zone by a dynamic volunteer-manager. Vaughan Jones met me on site and virtually drew a line in the sand, between a couple of ragwort plants, where the North boundary of the building was to be. Then Vaughan asked, "Can you build for a limit of



Tom and Molly Hodgson - Tom's Building Company constructed the National Field Days Guest Nation building

£8,500?” I replied, “I thought it was £10,000.” Vaughan countered, “We need £1,500 for a HQ Building”. We picked up some of the shortfall by not requiring an excavating contractor because the building site had been levelled by a volunteer, using a borrowed bulldozer! The other pluses were, shallower foundation trenches, easily dug by hand in the coarse, compact sand (not sticky clay), and someone had apparently picked up the tab for a few hundred pounds worth of structural steel, supplied from Auckland. There was a sense of urgency at the building site, made more enjoyable by the open air surroundings and by good staff and volunteers helping out.

The Guest Nation Building was a final job for Andrew Morrison, long-time icon of the Bricklayers fraternity. Vaughan and I engaged his redundant staff to carry on building, with blocks, an urgently needed toilet block, all at cost. T G H Ltd Builders then completed the roof frame of the Guest Nation Building, with its special feature, an obelisk-shaped, eye-catching protrusion above the apex, giving the building a distinct look - architectural, not utility - city style, not rural!

We never added up the total costs. “Good advertisement”, was the call, which was proven two years later when the British High Commission communicated with me for a major building job in Auckland. “Can you come and do it”? Sadly the answer was “no”. Molly and I were off on an overseas trip which lasted some nine months.

- Tom Hodgson



*Top - The main entrance roadway into the property and the future exhibition area under construction.
Bottom - Earthworks in the location known as Area One, later to also contain the Hamilton Car Club track.*

Fraser Graham recalls some of his early involvement with the Society and the Mystery Creek venue preparations

In the first year of the National Fieldays Days at the Te Rapa Racecourse (1969) I worked on the gates and helped with the cleanup afterwards.

The second year (1970) I helped with setting up for comparative machinery demonstrations and cleanup, and drove the Chief Marshal's truck. George Hillier was Chief Marshal in that year.



Fraser and Meryl Graham

In 1970 I was also involved with a group of committee-persons who began looking for a suitable property as a permanent home for the New Zealand National Field Days. The present site at Mystery Creek was finally settled upon. The owner, Mr MacGregor, was milking dairy cows on the property at the time of purchasing negotiations so we were not able to get possession of the land until 31st May, 1970.

Eventually there was only six months to build the British Guest Nation Building, a toilet block and develop a main road into the site before the first event in June 1971. A bulldozer, lent by Andrews and Bevan Ltd, was used for the roadwork, driven by Doug Baldwin, Vaughan Jones and myself. The pure sand, on which most of the property is situated, was consolidated by blending yellow ash sub-soil, and it held up well.

Water for the farm came from a spring on the south boundary, below the high bank, near where the Bledisloe Hall now stands. We improved the collection point and piped the water to a 5000 gallon storage tank in the middle of the proposed Exhibition Area. Davies Water Pumps supplied a pump which was fitted up by Eric Gillard, their Hamilton Agent. Both of those



Views 1970-1971: Main Road and Central Exhibition Area at Mystery Creek.



Development of the Mystery Creek property has been a continual activity every year since operations began, but the degree of volunteer participation and donation of materials and labour during the first decade was absolutely massive.



1971 - The Mystery Creek property showing the Guest Nation Pavilion, the O'Neill barn (centre) which was to become the WDFC Catering Centre for many years, and the formation of the Speedway track (foreground).

companies received a free exhibition site at the Field Days for several years, as a contra for their work.

The two Field Days at the Te Rapa Racecourse had provided an excess of some \$15,000 and this sum was used as a deposit on a show home, to be located on the top level, adjacent to Mystery Creek Road. The balance of costs for the house and its location was also a contra deal involving a 5-year free site agreement with the company.

The Mystery Creek farm was 158 acres. With all the excess income having been spent on the house the Society approached the ANZ Bank for a 100% Loan. Ossie James was the Society President and he suggested the ANZ, as this was his bank. The bank finally showed some interest but wanted adequate personal guarantees. Some six Society Members guaranteed \$500, and Vaughan Jones and myself \$2,000 but his was not enough. I suggested approaching William Stevenson who had just purchased Lochinvar Station, so Gordon Edgar, Vaughan Jones and myself called on him and left with a \$10,000 guarantee. This added amount of guarantee was considered adequate and the purchase was made possible.

In the early years it was important to get revenue from the farm itself. Gordon Edgar was the first Property Sub-Committee Chairman. He asked me to 'operate' the farm. I bought and sold the grazing stock. It meant travelling from my home to Mystery Creek (40km) every second day to move stock and check the water system.

The farm had a bad Ragwort problem. It took years of pulling and then spraying to get the property clean. Dr Llewellyn helped with this, but most was done by Vaughan Jones and his wife and family, and myself and my family. I also arranged a deal with New Zealand Dairy

Company to field-trial at Mystery Creek, the first Ancalf Milk Powder preparations. There were three different formulas.

For several years, in both Spring and Autumn, I contacted dairy farms and bought, then picked up, 250 calves each season (500 per year). When weaned they were sold at a good profit. During this time the first Society farm-worker employee, Brian Green, did most of the feeding-out and helped me with the regular weighings.

Each year, before the Society could afford to pay contractors, Doug Baldwin, Vaughan Jones and myself, kept loaned machinery working, often at night, to extend the property roading and contour the exhibition site areas. I used explosives to clear old Totara logs and Willows to make the lakes. The logs were carbon dated at 4000 years old.

Requirements for reticulated water required the system to grow to three 5000-gallon tanks and then to a 50,000-gallon timber tank with extra pumps and bigger piping. Power cables were laid under the water lines to provide a safety factor.

One year, an Exhibitor, the night before opening day, cut a water line, said nothing, and on opening morning all the water was gone. The New Zealand Dairy Company responded to my call for help and supplied milk tankers to bring enough water from Te Rapa to get catering and toilets working. After that it was decided to have a supply that could generate a quick recovery. I built a floating suction system in the Waikato River, which borders the property, arranged for new pumps and a water treatment system. This kept the storage tanks always full.



Fraser Graham checks out the tree planting beside a newly formed lake at Mystery Creek, c.1973

The need arose to pipe a creek which flowed across the property to the river. I purchased used culvert pipes, 3ft in diameter, for this purpose. Today, OSH would not approve of my method of laying of the pipes! The hired digger-operator (Murray Dreaden) was very skilled, however, on my own, three meters down in the dug-out creek, I fitted the pipes and released the chain. I was half covered up a number of times with the sand banks falling in.

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Wednesday, 26th May, 1971

It was reported that Mrs Peacocke (WDFC Catering) had obtained an O'Neill haybarn for the use of catering at the Field Days.

Thursday, 10th June, 1971

This was the last meeting of the NZ National Field Days Society Executive Committee to be held before the opening day of the 3rd NZ National Field Days at Mystery Creek.

A number of sub-committee chairmen reported on details concerning their respective duties, the number of exhibiting companies registered to date (*the final number was 90 - Editor*), and the number of entries received for competition and award sections.