

Chapter 8 YFC Participation

Graham McBride and Kerry Clarkin recall and comment on Waikato Young Farmers Clubs' involvement in the NZ National Field Days

Over the years of development of the NZ Agricultural Fielddays and the NZ National Fielddays Society a close association evolved with the Waikato District Young Farmers Clubs (YFC). From the first NZ National Field Days through to about 2004, YFC was responsible for managing the car parking but many members were also involved in other activities. A number of YFC members went on to have a long involvement with Fielddays as Society Members, Event Organisers and Office Bearers in the Society.

Prior to the First Field Days event at Te Rapa in 1969, the Te Kowhai Young Farmers Club was asked to assist with car parking and crowd control. Doug Baldwin was 'volunteered' by John Scott on the basis that he was the nearest YFC guy to the racecourse and Doug states, "and I was silly enough to say yes." The Te Kowhai Club's involvement was a case of seeing what worked on the day and having a go. Doug commented, "There was never enough parking at Te Rapa. It was not structured at all and YFC was 'Joe Blow' for everything."



The second NZ National Field Days saw the involvement of Waikato District Young Farmers which provided for larger pool of 'parkers' as the understanding and complexity of car parking and crowd control emerged. This early assistance was seen by YFC as 'public good' and for both years at Te Rapa and for some four to six years at Mystery Creek was done by YFC "free and gratis." Waikato District YFC's, John Davison, took over control from Doug Baldwin after a few years and then



Parking requirements at Mystery Creek took on enormous proportions as attendance numbers increased each year. The above aerial photos (1980-1982) indicate just a fraction of the parking areas available at that time.

Kerry Clarkin took over managing the YFC car parking in 1976 until he was elected NZ Agricultural Fieldays Exhibits Chairman in 1982. When Kerry Clarkin retired from Young Farmers, Terry Tusa ran the car parking until 2004 at which time membership numbers of YFC had declined and it had become difficult to obtain enough support to park cars.

At Mystery Creek, until the late 1970's, YFC worked in close association with the New Zealand Army who provided internal transport and communications for the car parking marshals. When the Army withdrew from assisting the car parking, YFC had to obtain its own on-site transport and administration centre. Caravans were borrowed from members' families and some were borrowed from Fieldays exhibitors. The New Zealand Motor Corp was especially generous to YFC in this regard.

Generally the public were passively accepting of the parking marshals. However, sometimes the directions of the car parker was followed rather grudgingly. People just wanted to get as close as they could to the exhibition area and parking area gateways so as to be able to get away as fast as they could from the venue later in the day. YFC car parking volunteers often worked under difficult conditions due to lack of facilities and to make it more difficult, it seemed to rain at almost every event! Parking was conducted in all weathers and in some atrocious circumstances, even to our 'girls' hand-pushing stuck cars from muddy tracks. Kerry Clarkin remembers one occasion in the pouring rain pushing vehicles out with a large tyre fastened to the front of what was considered a 'flash' tractor in those days, a Ford County, on loan from an exhibitor. Car drivers were horrified but their choice was to remain



By 1997 parking had been extended to nearby Hamilton Airport with a fleet of buses hired to bring visitors to the venue, and arrangements with nearby life-style block owners also provided additional areas for vehicles.

stuck for the night or be unceremoniously pushed out by YFC members for whom the novelty of car parking had receded around the time of receiving a lukewarm pie, supplied for lunch.

Most motorists were generally good. Occasionally one would be generous (as in dropping the odd \$20 note out the car window after being pushed out of the mud) but some could be real trouble. The prevailing summary amongst YFC 'management' was, "the 'flasher' the car the bigger 'the exhibitor'"! For some reason, for instance, Jaguar drivers, were people who considered the flag waver something to be ignored, as if the ownership of an expensive car meant they were exempt from walking any distance from their parked car, like the rest of the Fieldays visitors. One YFC member even got his foot run over by an arrogant driver as he attempted to prevent him from parking in an unacceptable location. On another occasion the NZ Army's timely appearance prevented Kerry from getting a beating from an irate, and particularly uncooperative, member of the public. One experienced car park organiser even took to carrying a box of matches in case someone *REALLY* annoyed one of the YFC parkers. When such a driver over-provoked or abused a volunteer car parker, the matches could appear and be inserted into the tyre valve. Nothing like a flat tyre or two at the end of a Fieldays visit to 'level' the score! However, those sort of uncooperative drivers were relatively rare. Most patrons simply followed the marshals and headed into the parking areas without sparing another thought to the logistics of car parking or the YFC personnel.

During the 1970's and 1980's YFC was doing a lot of work with ACC (Accident Compensation Commission) to try and improve the on-farm health and safety of its members. Young Farmers were asked to assist with safety at the Fieldays and to provide personnel to keep patrons at a safe distance from machinery



Field Days visitors to Mystery Creek, in the early 1970's, using a popular method of transport up and down the hill between the upper car parks and the exhibition area. This practice was eventually discontinued, for safety reasons.

demonstrations. Kerry Clarkin fondly remembers Mr. Halsey Mansel, who worked for the Labour Department and later the ACC, and who advised YFC on safety many matters. Kerry recalls being Safety Officer and the difficulty he had in keeping excited and inquisitive people a safe distance away from the turning rotors of the first helicopter to ever land at Fieldays. Another of YFC's duties was ride on the rear of the trailers being towed by tractors, as Safety Officers, while carrying patrons up and down the Gate 2 entrance hill. Another task of a YFC Safety Officer was to watch out for and report, any exhibition display area problems such as uncovered tent pegs or exhibitor staff undertaking unsafe practices.

During the late 70's, as a day-one car parker, Graham McBride, of Te Kowhai YFC, was collared by ACC's Rural Safety Consultant, Ron de Pina, given an orange jacket and a clipboard and told that he was the Safety Officer for the National Agricultural Fieldays. His



Earthmoving demonstrations always attracted groups of interested onlookers and safety officers were kept busy ensuring safety rules were observed.

somewhat hurried instructions were to supervise the exhibitors' display stands at pre-arranged times to view their safety arrangements and to manage the timing of their individual, demonstration activities. So, there was Graham supervising the safety of the public while massive earthmoving equipment went through their paces. There is nothing like a 'close encounter' with an appreciative audience to encourage a demonstrator to

push his equipment to the limit! It soon became apparent that being a Safety Officer was a somewhat dubious distinction.

In that same year the Agricultural Fieldays Demonstrations Committee had decided to use explosives to blast the swamp near where the Bledisloe Hall now stands, to create an ornamental lake. In the midst of thousands of interested spectators who had been advised on the public address system of the pending display, Graham had to control the mass 'evacuation' of this boggy area with the help of explosives manufacturer, ICI, who was

sponsoring the main on-site demonstration. Kerry had been parking cars next to the swamp up until that time and had then begun parking vehicles in the paddocks on the top of the high bank overlooking the blast area. 'BOOM!' Mud flew higher than the high bank and many of the patrons' cars in the vicinity, and some of the down-wind patrons themselves, needed a good washing! The creation of the



*The 'ornamental lake' (foreground) as it looked in 1973.
(See Clydesdale Museum Chapters for much later views)*

instant lake was successful, however in hindsight, Graham (and the Fieldays Society) admitted to being blissfully unaware of all the things that could have gone wrong. Imagine today, the consequences of such an exhibition going wrong, and people being seriously injured. OSH and the Police and every other regulatory body would be all over the organisers with a big stick! However 'in them thar days' that was just the way it was done.

YFC also ran the NZ National Fieldays Sculpture Competition. This involved using recycled farm bits and pieces to create 'junk art'. In the midst of the millions of dollars of shiny new equipment at the Fieldays the junk art seemed to attract a lot of attention. Additionally, YFC also had its own display site for a number of years to promote the organisation and encourage membership. As part of this, around 1986, YFC lampooned ACC Safety Consultant, Jim Mitchell, who despite mandatory installation of frames on tractors had a 'fergie' on his farmlet with no safety frame. The focal point of the YFC display was an upturned and wrecked tractor with a life sized dummy jammed underneath. In front was a 'borrowed' gravestone with the sign-written words:

*In Loving Memory of Jim
If he had his Safety Frame
He'd Still be in the Game*

This display won 'Runner up, Best Fieldays Site' and to his credit the real ACC 'Jim' posed for photographs beside the upturned tractor. Sadly, the wonderful relationship YFC had with ACC in education and training in safety was discontinued in the late 1980's when a new accountant deemed that there was no financial cost-benefit for ACC to be involved in rural safety days, and reassigned the Rural Safety Consultants to an urban focus.

So, YFC has had many roles at Fieldays. Principally car parkers but also safety officers, site demonstrators, organisers of the sculpture competition, transporters of personal and protectors of public safety. In many ways efficient car parking by volunteer YFC set the scene for a successful Fieldays. A happy motorist, parked close to the exhibition area, was in the 'Fieldays mood' from the outset. Money raised from some 33 years of paid car parking was used by Waikato District Young Farmers to fund many of its activities, not the least being to actively educate members on health and safety on the farm. The involvement of members of Young Farmers has also had a large effect on the development of the Fieldays Society with a number of YFC members going on to take office as Board Members, Chairmen of the Agricultural Fieldays, Property Chairmen and Presidents of the Society. And tribute must be made to the many YFC members who often got up before daybreak to shift stock in the mud on their farms, and then spent their 'days off' directing traffic in wet weather gear and standing around in yet more mud.