



# Matakanui Station

## A History

In September 1859 a depasturing licence was issued to Richard Anthony Filleul. The area consisted of 80,000 acres and the boundaries being described as the Dunstan Mountains, the Lauder creek, the Manuherikia River and Moutere Station. From 1859, Run 223 appears to have had a number of owners; Henry Porson Morse, William Morley and Frederick Chamberlin. It wasn't until 1861 that Matakanui was settled and run by George Thomson and his family. The family built a small hut at the entrance to, what later became known as, Thomson's Gorge. George purchased 7000 merinos in Australia to stock the run and by 1862 there were 11,490 sheep on Matakanui.

Gold was discovered and the town of Drybread was set up overnight with the associated problems of a large influx of people into a wilderness area. After a severe winter and the death of his wife, Thomson sold Matakanui Station to Brothers James and Henry Glassford in 1864.



Gold sluicing at Drybread © MAF

The Brothers came from their family Estate of Dougalstone in Stirlingshire. A new house was built at Black Bush Creek, three miles from Thomson's Gorge which James lived in with many servants, a coach and four horses, a stable of excellent racing horses and cocks for fighting. By 1866 the Station ran 19,545 sheep and the following year acquired the Lauder Run of about 80,000 acres from Des Voeux and Cogle, which increased the total flock to 31,744 sheep. In addition, Lauder Station ran nearly 1600 cattle, making it the seventh largest station in Otago. Lauder was eventually sold to the Handyside Brothers and John Roberts in 1869. Despite the sale the Lauder and Matakanui stations continued to be run together. Around this time, a boundary rider called Robert McIntosh was granted land in dispute between Moutere and Matakanui. He named the land the Disputed Spur Farm.

By 1868, James was a Magistrate, had started the Vincent Racecourse, and was a councillor on the Vincent County. However, extravagant living and low wool prices caused Glassford to go into debt and the bank appointed Robert Laurie as manager. It was nearly five years before he could get over this crisis and appoint his own manager, James Potter Davidson.

An area of 640 acres of Black Bush Flat was Freeholded in 1873 securing the Homestead as a pre-emptive right. At about this time all the trees and bushes around the homestead were sold and in the following February James Glassford and nine children left for Scotland after every stick of timber and iron, doors, gates and furniture were dismantled and sold off of the eight year old house. Glassford entrusted his affairs to J.M.Ritchie and G.G.Russell, who later became the founders of the National Mortgage and Agency Company.

Between 1874 and 1882 there were three subdivisions of Matakanui Station; The Spottis Hundreds of 6,800 acres; the Lauder Blocks of 7,800 acres; and divisions of the hill into Runs 223 a,b,c,d and e of a total 58,000 acres which was retained by Glassford. Davidson continued to manage the property until 1879 when he also returned to Scotland and Ritchie employed John Stronach. Matakanui prospered.

In 1881, James died, aged 48 years. Stronach fenced off the high country and was able to confine the sheep for the summer and conserve winter feed enabling them to carry 34,000 sheep without the Lauder block. After a failed attempt by James' eldest son, Harry, to take over the management of Matakanui, the Station was advertised for sale in February 1883. It was subsequently sold to William Laidlaw and David Crawford, in October for 27,000 pounds. Harry was helped to acquire 600 acres of the Lauder Block, married and settled there.

Laidlaw and Crawford bought 1100 acres of freehold on either side of the racecourse in 1885 which gave them a total of 2000 acres in 4 blocks. They added to an already established homestead, planting trees and building a tennis court and

garden, extending the house to provide room for entertaining. In 1903, a further 1600 acres was taken north of the Spottis Hundred. At this point Matakanui Station comprised of 55,902 acres and ran nearly 20,000 sheep. However, pressure for more agricultural land was mounting and on the 24th February 1910 most of the runs were cut up leaving Laidlaw and Crawford with about 800 acres round the homestead.

In the late 1910's William Laidlaw's health took a turn for the worst and the Station was sold on November 1919 for about 40,000 pounds to Andrew Cowie Scoular and partner William Sutherland. They also took on a young shepherd called Billy Young who had arrived to work for Laidlaw earlier in the year. There was considerable public agitation for more land, most particularly by a neighbour called Tom Read who arranged petitions in 1928 against the renewal of leases in 1931. After succeeding to renew the lease, Scoular sold the Homestead Block and built a large English gabled brick home on the Run in 1929. He also built a very modern and innovative woolshed and wooden cottage.

Sutherland left in 1931 and Billy Young became head shepherd. In 1938, after a time in Dunedin working for Dalgety and having married Belle Faulks in 1935, the eldest son, Bill Scoular, went into partnership with his father. Andrew Scoular continued working on the station and also represented the Matakanui Riding Club as a Vincent County Councillor. On his death in 1945, aged 57, he had represented the area for 24 years. In 1947 Bill Scoular was elected to the Council continuing his father's legacy. Further expanding on his father's work Bill increased the paddocks of hay and oat, as well as the irrigated areas. Aerial topdressing, a new innovation, began to be used on the paddocks to great effect.

In 1953, Run 223J was freeholded for 10,750 pounds. Increasingly involved in local affairs and becoming Chairman in 1955, Bill found running the property increasingly difficult through the lack of quality staff. Matakanui

was therefore put up for sale in 1955, offered and declined by the Crown, and finally bought by James Scott Paterson for 100,000 pounds in 1958.

Jim Paterson was from Gimmerburn, near Ranfurly, and had four sons, John, William (Bill), Martin and Dickson. John took over the management of Matakanui in 1959 aged 18 with 2 staff, one of which was Billy Young now in his 50s. Construction of airstrips facilitated the initial aerial topdressing of the flat and hill country under the guidance of Terry Ludecka, a MAF soil scientist. In 1963 Ida Valley Station was purchased by John. That same year Bill came to Matakanui, aged 20.

Billy Young died on the job on 10th June 1965 in his 65th year; 47 of them for three owners of Matakanui Station.

McDonald Downs in North Canterbury was bought in 1966 and Bill moved up and Martin came on board in 1968. By this time the stock numbers had doubled largely thanks to the use of topdressing. Jim Paterson continued to lend a hand throughout this time and was also heavily involved in County and local affairs. At the age of 59, Jim died in 1976.

Matakanui Station as it exists today consists of 23,000 acres rising to 5000' on the Dunstan Mountains. The majority of usable land is made up of long leading spurs, open tussock flats and irrigated paddocks. Since 1972 when it was only 19,000 acres and partially developed, the station has continued to expand: then the Disputed Spur Farm (now Matakanui Downs) totalling 1100 acres was purchased in 1976 and a further 3000 acres of Run 223k were added in 1994. The Station winters 15,000 sheep, mainly Polwarth's, and 1100 head of Hereford cattle



Matakanui fleece