

# Laagers in the Wilderness

## The origins of pastoralism in the southern North Island districts, 1840-55

BRAD PATTERSON

The title of my paper arises from a seeming parallel. Less than a decade after the Cape Colony 'Voortrekkers' had set out on their epic journey, their advance into the wilderness was replicated, albeit on a much reduced scale, in New Zealand's southern North Island districts. With pastoralism on any significant scale having been effectively blocked out at the New Zealand Company's first settlement site, the Port Nicholson pastoralists, smarting at the apparent indifference to their plight, and despite warnings that any private arrangements for the occupation of Maori land would not be recognised, assembled their stock and moved to lands beyond the Company's jurisdiction. From late 1844 mobs wending their way round the south east coastline to the Wairarapa Valley, and northwards from Porirua up the western coast, became a not uncommon sight.

Obviously, the parallel cannot be taken too far. Such pastoral outbreaks were by no means unique in the colonies. The movement of pastoralists from the original nineteen New South Wales counties is but one other example. Moreover, while the 'Great Trek' was a regimented exodus, the departure of the squatters from Port Nicholson was the product of individual initiative. It fell to each stockowner to make his personal decision to decamp, to then make transit arrangements, and, once an agreeable future run site had been reached, to come to agreement with the Maori owners for rental occupancy. This last is important. In the southern North Island there was no attempt simply to seize the lands necessary. Consequently, there was far less tension between incursors and indigenes. But the fact remains that for a short space of time - certainly not more than a decade and a half - isolated pastoral cantonments were the characteristic units of settlement in the southern North Island out-districts, i.e. the lands beyond the first

settlement, and the subsidiary settlement at Wanganui. Hence the term 'laagers'. These laagers constituted discrete spots in nineteenth-century space. They were sited in pockets of fern and grassland, hemmed in by the bush. For much of the period, also, they were grace and favour islands of European enterprise in a sea of Maori land.

What, then, do we know about the southern North Island pastoral exodus, and of the characteristics of the form of pastoralism established? I would venture to suggest - not a great deal. The historiography of New Zealand sheepfarming has been bedevilled by romanticism: tales of brave squatters - the John Waynes of the New Zealand sheep frontier; heroic accounts of gentlemen surviving all odds and retiring to comfort in the 'old country'; the civilising activities of the Lady Barkers. Moreover, most of this writing has been South Island oriented. Insofar as southern North Island pastoralism has been written about, two works only stand out: a 1962 thesis by R.D. Hill on the early Wairarapa squatters; and the late A.G. Bagnall's monumental *Wairarapa: An Historical Excursion*. Hill's slim volume *The Land and the Squatters - Wairarapa 1843-1853* is a first step towards a theoretical approach to the development of pastoralism. Bagnall, on the other hands, provides rich case studies of some early Wairarapa runs, but he is only marginally concerned with the analysis of process. The present paper is an attempt to provide an overview of pastoral expansion in the years to 1855.

### **The Background To The Pastoral Exodus**

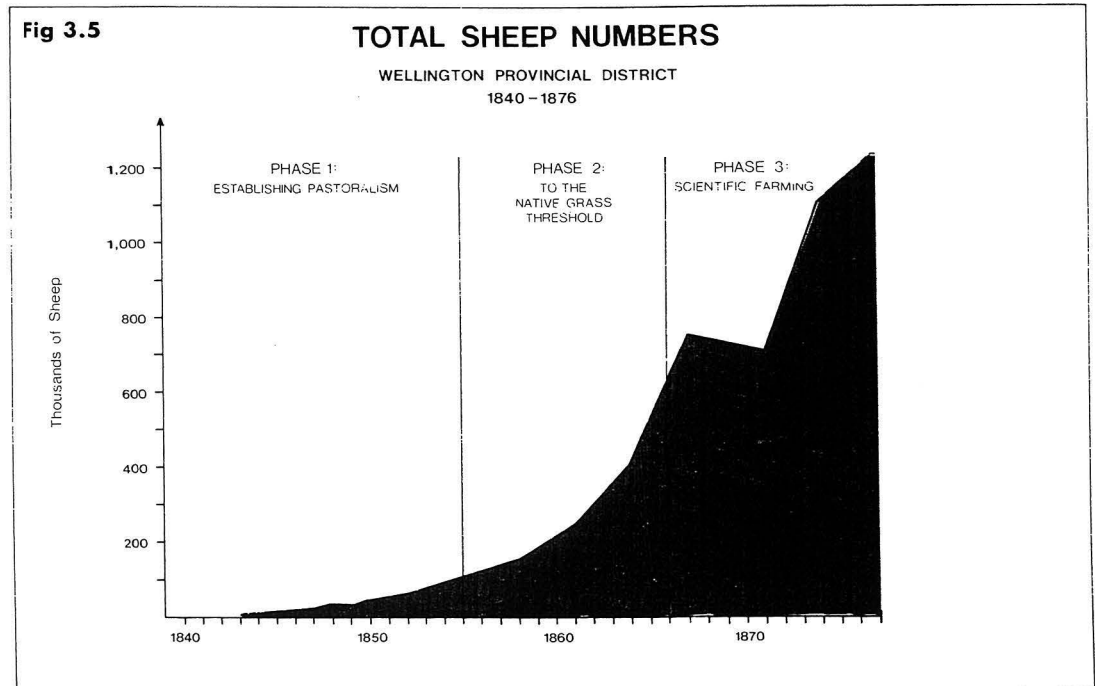
It is perhaps appropriate first to demonstrate the magnitude of southern North Island pastoral expansion. While a range of indices might be employed, as useful as any is total stock numbers and, although cattle were not unimportant, sheep provide an obvious yardstick. Between 1843 and 1876 the total sheep grazed in the southern North Island rose from around 5000 to

more than 1.2 million (see chart below). Broadly, three distinct expansionary phases can be distinguished. The first, the concern of the present paper, was the establishment or proving phase. During these years the viability of pastoralism as a foundation for the fledgling colonial economy was amply demonstrated. Thereafter, in the second phase, roughly between 1855 and the late 1860s, sheep were pushed out to the limits of the available natural grass and fernlands. The third phase commenced when diminishing marginal returns compelled the adoption of more sophisticated sheepfarming practices, leading in turn to improved stocking rates. Although, in absolute terms, the expansion was greatest in the second and third phases, in percentage terms the rapidity of expansion was no less startling in the first phase. The 5000 sheep in the southern districts in 1843 had risen to 45,000 by 1850. By 1855 the total stood at 194,000.

What underlay expansion of this magnitude? To understand, it is necessary to go back to the foundation of the Wellington settlement, even before, to the economic reasoning underlying its establishment. Wellington, it need scarcely be stressed, was a Company settlement, and it is wellknown that extensive pastoralism was the form of economic activity least favoured by Company theorists. Gibbon Wakefield, himself,

likened pastoralists to the nomadic tribes of Central Asia. Instead, the Company planners favoured mixed farming, with a decided emphasis on grain production, the projected estates being organised on lines similar to those in the agricultural counties of southern England. The lands to be settled, stated the Company's promotional literature, would be 'perfect for agriculture' and 'immediately fit for the plough'. Soon the southern North Island landscape would be transformed into a mosaic of corn-crammed parallelograms, neat hedgerows and trim country seats. An anomaly or two in the Company's promotional literature might, however, be noted in passing. For example, it was never fully explained just why the natural grasslands, curiously so suited to the plough, were inadequate for the sustenance of sheep and cattle. Or why a climate so conducive to agriculture threatened heavy stock mortality. Nor was it fully explained why vegetation which would tear fleeces from the sheeps' backs would yield easily to agriculturists.

For the Company's economic strategy to have been successful, it was essential that the projected grain estates prosper. This they failed to do. After a short boom in the early 1840's, confined mainly to newly-cleared lands in the Hutt, the estates system first dwindled, then collapsed completely. Not a single ton of locally produced



grain was exported from Wellington in the first six colonising years. Not even sufficient was produced to feed the settlers themselves. The reasons for the failure were varied and complex, and are only marginally pertinent to the present discussion. Briefly, the Company was simply unable to supply all of the lands sold, while some of the best were allotted to absentees. Yet, quite apart from difficulties intrinsic to the Company's land disposal system, the practicalities of pioneering agronomics proved testing. Transportation to broken bushlands, when open prairies had been expected, was just the start. Thereafter, nearly everything went wrong. Clearing bush proved arduous and expensive. British seeds proved problematical in the new environment. New cultivation methods had to be devised amidst the stumps. Even where seeds struck, the initial fertility of the virgin soil was soon exhausted (per acre yields almost halved in four years). By 1845, just five years after colonising had begun, the settlement planned to encompass 110,000 arable acres had only 70 in gardens and 380 in cultivated fields i.e. an average of about one tenth of an acre per settler was in active agricultural use. Of the hundreds of estates envisaged, fewer than a dozen had even properly started.

Arable failure left the settlers, if not the remarkably sanguine settlement organisers, with a dilemma. If the long term viability of the settlement was to be established - and some were beginning to have doubts - a suitable export product, a staple, would have to be found. The extent of the problem becomes clear from an examination of the export statistics. Up until 1848 whale bone and oil consistently accounted for 60/70% of all exports by value. Significantly, systematic settlement was not a prerequisite for exploitation of that resource. Little wonder, then, that the search for a staple reached almost frantic proportions. In the course of it, potential exploiters had to keep several considerations in mind. Whatever the form of land use chosen, land being the prime local resource, it would have to be: first, one suited to existing environmental conditions; second, one where the existing supply of inputs - both overseas and local - would be sufficient to ensure ready establishment; third, it would have to be a form of production where the necessary technology was not only freely available, but also in balance with the expected monetary return; fourth, and above all, a reliable market had to exist.

Fortunately, the key to salvation was close to

hand, to some extent already in the settlement, but with an important prototype just a few thousand miles away. Some decades earlier New South Wales had faced the same dilemma: the need to find a land use activity capable of sustaining long term growth. There the solution had been sheep raising for the supply of wool to the British textile industry. To leading Wellington settlers, the concept of emulation was seductive. From all angles, the raising of sheep for wool appeared to meet the previously outlined desiderata admirably. Notwithstanding Company strictures, that sheep would thrive in New Zealand conditions had already been demonstrated by the rapid expansion of small flocks continuously introduced from the first months of 1840. That suitable land would be available was taken for granted. While it was accepted there would be limitations on expansion immediately adjacent to the settlement hub, empty grass and fernlands were apparently there further out. That these were still in the hands of Maori owners was a small matter; one easily overcome by smooth tongues and token rentals. Fortunately, also, sheepfarming was light on initial input requirements. Almost the only substantial expenditure would be on livestock. Expensive plant was not required; labour requirements would be minimal. Little sophisticated technology was considered necessary. The clinching factor was that buyers were available; indeed clamouring. Non-perishable, and easily transported despite its bulk, wool was valuable enough to bear the expense of a long voyage to the United Kingdom, and thence to the looms of the North of England. With the crucial decision made, the southern North Island districts were well on the way to becoming, to borrow an Australian phrase, 'yet another "sheepwalk of the Empire"'.

### **The Dynamics of Expansion**

Earlier it was suggested that the expansion of the southern North Island sheep industry could be divided into three main phases between 1840-76. The first of these, the establishment phase, can be divided into sub-phases:

1. 1840-44: Port Nicholson Sub-phase
2. 1844-50: Illegal Leaseholds Sub-phase
3. 1850-55: Crown License Sub-phase

#### **1. Squatting about the harbour**

Although, strictly speaking, the first commercial flock might be considered to have been es-

tablished on Mana Island in 1832, for present purposes the first sub-phase opened in 1840, and ran roughly to 1844. It was a period when the full focus was on 'squatting' around and about Port Nicholson. Despite the Company's entrenched opposition, it was always likely that extensive stock rearing would figure prominently. Agrarian failure simply provided a boost. Within weeks of the arrival of the first settlers, in January 1840, a shipload of cattle had been landed on the Petone beach, and in the succeeding three years further stock shipments from the Australian colonies had been regularly received. By September 1843 there were already 4,843 sheep and 1,394 cattle depastured on the beach fringes, in bush clearings, and on open scrublands adjacent to the chosen first town. Yet, with many, if not the majority, of the early stockowners harking from New South Wales or Van Diemen's Land, few had been able to take advantage of the Company's London land offerings. They were therefore compelled to make other arrangements. In a few cases, surveyed estates were acquired from prior Company purchasers. In others, estate parcels were rented from resident owners or the agent of absentees. The most common course, however, was the unsanctioned appropriation of lands yet to be surveyed, unoccupied estate lands, and even Maori reserves. So the squatting occupation of the open lands of the southern North Island began. Though the Port Nicholson subphase was destined to be short, the individual returns were so encouraging that others, even some who had embarked under Company aegis, were soon drawn in.

With the running of flocks and herds on vacant lands fringing Port Nicholson being an essentially evanescent phenomenon, precise reconstruction of the occupancy pattern in the early 1840s is extremely difficult. Certainly it is possible to pluck out isolated examples, for instance Molesworth's Tettcott cattle farm on Watts Peninsular, or Barney Rhodes' runs at Fitzroy Bay and Makara, but these are exceptions rather than the rule. The predominantly landless stockowners - the majority - had two basic requirements: the availability of sufficient forage for their animals; and the likelihood of freedom from objection by disgruntled land purchasers. When either feed ran out, or trespass disputes threatened, stock were driven on to new temporary resting places. Hence the location of any individual owner's stock might vary greatly within a few months; and any suggestion of sustainable ter-

ritorial claims, much less recognised boundaries, was out of the question. The most favoured locations, however, were the low hills and corridors immediately to the south of the Wellington town site, the sandy isthmus between Evans Bay and Lyall Bay, and the thin littoral strips abutting the harbour's eastern shore. In the early months of 1840, the initial stock movements from Petone beach were to the eastern harbour strips, with flocks strung out right to Pencarrow Head by the end of that year. With the switch of town building focus to Lambton Harbour, the push was extended to the only open land in the vicinity of the town site. There, it was asserted, lay 'good grass aplenty' in the country running from the town boundary to the southern coast, and stockowners were not backward in testing the truth of the assertion. Before 1840 was out, struggling stock columns had pushed down to Island Bay and Ohiro Bay, with detachments then heading east and west from those points. With little delay further stock was directly offloaded at Evans Bay and from there spread over the sandhills of the isthmus and on towards Watts Peninsula. By mid 1841, with most of the first occupied localities crammed to capacity, newcomers were compelled to search for grazing in the hill country to the west of the town, and, with the opening of a track to Porirua, stock also began to filter through to the western harbour flats.

By mid-1844 the pastoral cadre was under almost intolerable pressure. Over the preceding twelve months the number of sheep depastured in the first settlement had near doubled to 8000 head, while cattle numbers had also continued to climb. At the same time, with Company estate surveying drawing to a close, the land stock available for interim pastoral use had shrunk drastically. The pressure was something that even the Company recognised, and it was in recognition of the need for a 'safety-valve' that several proposals aimed at making specifically grazing properties available through the existing lands distribution system were aired. This was no reflection of a change of heart by the Company principals, rather a realisation that pastoral expansion should be kept under control. It was also realised that land could not be made available adjacent to Port Nicholson; but its existence beyond the ranges encircling the first settlement suggested a way out. One proposal was that some of those lands should be acquired by the Company, surveyed into 640 acre blocks, and then be put up for auction. Once such

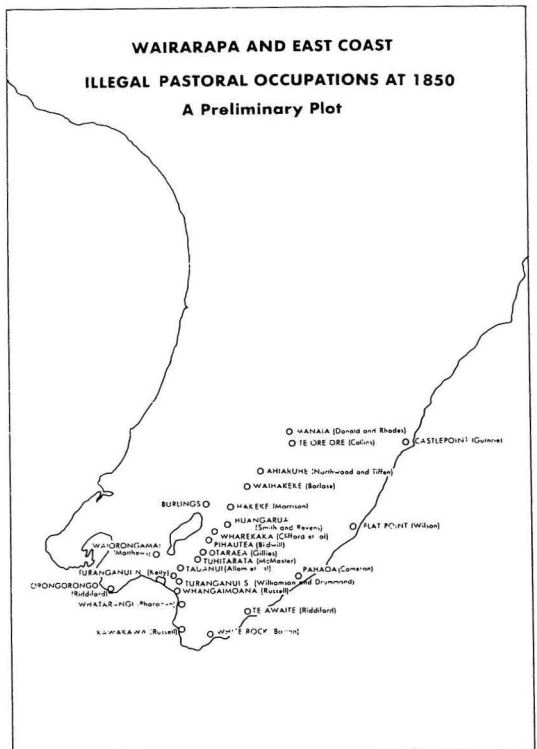
properties had been made available, the colonial administration must be enjoined to bring in rigorous anti-squatting legislation. By this means the pastoral 'nomads' could be transformed into stable stockfarmers. An alternative proposal, subject still to acquisition of the land required, was that the Company should offer 'squatting licenses' for competition, but reserving the right to dispose of the land eventually in any way that it chose. When the land was required for closer settlement the pastoralists would be pushed on to pastures new. Neither proposal was actively put to the test. While prepared to debate, Company officials were unready to commit themselves finally to radical departures from pre-settlement planning, much less to the expenditure involved in securing the required lands. The pastoralists, however, were as aware of the lands in the hinterland as the officers. In their view, the only course left open was unilateral action. So the 'Trek' began. Within twelve months of the commencement of the pastoral migration more than a dozen runs, most of considerable size, had been established on Maori land in the outdistricts.

## 2. The era of the illegal occupations

The second sub-phase ran from about mid 1845 till at least the end of 1850; and by the end of the latter year the number of illegal occupations had more than tripled, over 40,000 sheep grazing within their often indistinct boundaries. Yet, if the breakout solved some problems for the pastoralists, the removal to the unpurchased districts brought new ones. By their very nature the Maori leaseholds offered no security of tenure, the terms of holding being variable according to owner's whim. Moreover, with the pastoralists show of independence having been frowned upon, not only by the Company but also by the Colonial Government, there seemed little prospect of their claims being recognised even if the lands concerned passed to the Crown.

Without doubt, the Wairarapa Valley proved the most popular destination for the early pastoral 'trekkers'. From the beginnings of settlement, intelligence of seemingly endless near empty lowlands to the east and north east had filtered back to Port Nicholson. The attraction proved irresistible and, after reconnaissance, two advance parties set out in May 1844. Where they led, others followed. By April 1845 twelve separate pastoral laagers had been established. Two years later three further runs had been added. Late in 1848 the Colonial Government

discovered that there were no fewer than thirty-three separate 'occupations' of Maori land, and of this number twenty-one could be classified as extensive pastoral runs. Ranging from 600 to 15,600 acres in extent, and held on annual rentals of from £12-£76, but with rentals by no means always related to acreage, the runs were by that point depasturing 23,4000 sheep and 2,400 cattle. The occupancy pattern of these early years, however, was essentially fluid. The respective acreages held by individuals fluctuated from year to year, while, despite a stable kernel, a number of the occupations changed hands, several regularly. Indeed, it is likely that those distinguished represent only the successful crest of a wave of hopefuls endeavouring to establish in the district. As Bagnall has so aptly observed, the researchers' way is made the more difficult by the number of 'Phantom pastoralists' encountered. Even so, by late 1850, when the Government finally placed a clamp on further illegal leasing arrangements, at least an informal outline of the future Wairarapa runholding pattern had been created.



Elsewhere in the Maori-owned districts, the pastoral advance took the form of a slow rippled spread. First to be occupied was the narrow

plain strip north of Paekakariki. By late 1846 the pastoral occupancy of lands in the vicinity of Lake Horowhenua, regardless of Company claims to the locality, brought tripartite tensions between Company, pastoralists and the local Maori. Grazing south of the Manawatu River, however, was always transient, the owners making clear their estate could be regarded as no more than a temporary resting place. North of the Manawatu, the stockowners, once arrived, were less ready to move on. Several large runs were leased in the mid-1840s on the open country between the Manawatu and Rangitikei Rivers, their fortunate holders enjoying relatively undisturbed possession for more than two decades. Latecomers, initially unprepared to settle for what was left, had little alternative but to continue the advance. In August 1849, just as Company surveyors were setting out the first Rangitikei 'compensation lands', the first mobs were driven into their district, thus initiating a squabble between the squatters and the Company farmers being introduced. Prior to 1849 grazing further to the northwest was restricted by hostilities in the Wanganui district. After that date, however, stock was shipped north by schooner, landed at the river port, and then drafted in small mobs further north along the coast, i.e. beyond the bounds of the Wanganui Block. The only other immediately utilizable grazing tracts lay in the northeast, in the Ahuriri district, but it was not till 1850 that the movement of livestock commenced on any scale. Again, the initial incursion was by sea, but by the end of 1850 the first flocks were arriving overland from the Wairarapa.

During the mid- and late-1840s there was no set procedure, legal or otherwise, for entering pastoralists to follow when determining the acreages and boundaries of 'occupations' with their Maori landlords. Moreover, reinforcing early warnings that such arrangements would not be considered valid, the *Native Land Purchase Ordinance* 1847 made it an offence for any individual to purchase or rent lands from Maori without the express permission of the Colonial Government. With such permission unlikely, the prohibition tended to be ignored. What evolved, therefore, was a ritual based on Maori custom, lightly wrapped in the trappings of English Common Law. Previous to driving stock to a district, the pastoralist made contact with representatives of the customary owners. When, after lengthy haggling, mutually acceptable terms were hammered out, pastoralist and

owners proceeded to walk the boundaries, natural features being selected for definition whenever possible. Only after all stages had been carried through were the terms of occupancy enshrined in a European styled document. The question of Maori leases will be returned to, but this much should be said: despite much being made of the capriciousness of certain Maori landlords, and of the aggressive attitude of some sections of the pastoral invading force, on the whole the system worked tolerably well.

Given the illegality of the process by which occupations were taken up, and the mercurial nature of the process itself, the absence of contemporary maps and plans showing the relative location, shape and size of individual pastoral holdings is scarcely surprising. Indeed, in the course of ten years' research only one such map has turned up. It is of the Wairarapa Valley in 1849. The origins of the representation are interesting. In December 1848 the Company commissioned its former Surveyor-General, Captain Mein Smith, to prepare what it called 'an accurate general chart of the Valley of the Ruamahanga'. In addition to locating the main natural features, the chart was to show, with as much accuracy as possible, the location of the runs then occupied. There could be no mistaking the Company's intention. It was again contemplating purchasing the Wairarapa, but for closer settlement, not the accommodation of pastoralists. Scarcely surprising, then, that the surveyor was instructed to proceed with the utmost discretion. Intimation of intention would engender strong resistance both from pastoralists and the rent collecting Maori owners. Smith faithfully fulfilled his commission, but the Company's plans went no further. Towards the end of 1849 the Principal Agent conveyed to his London superiors that the idea had been abandoned. The Wairarapa, he wrote, was 'nearly filled with parties openly holding extensive runs', and new columns were appearing in the district. His point was well made.

By 1850 it was evident that further proliferation of leasehold 'occupations' on Maori lands could not be permitted. The uncontrolled expansion, despite profits, was giving rise to tensions; tensions between the occupiers and their landlords, amongst stockowners, and between pastoralists and their Company sponsored neighbours. Yet there was little agreement as to the most appropriate remedial action. Publicly, the Company was unrelenting. The squatters must be turned off, the lands acquired, and these

handed over to the Company for redistribution. Privately, however, officials acknowledged that such a course would be unrealistic. The Colonial Government was equivocal. While railing against this 'serious evil', it took no steps to accede to the Company's demands, or even to enforce its own laws. The pastoralists felt themselves caught in a vice. But not all of their fears were well-grounded. By their unilateral actions the pastoralists had established prior claims to consideration; and by taking no action the Government had made retrospective enforcement of the anti-squatting legislation a hopeless proposition. Actual possession placed the 'occupiers' in an important bargaining position. Moreover, many of the 'big men' of the settlement were now within the pastoralists' ranks, men too powerful and influential to be dislodged without a fierce struggle. Yet, if the pastoralists were not to be dislodged, they had to be more satisfactorily accommodated. So was the third sub-phase initiated.

### 3. Grazing under crown license

The opportunity to impose a semblance of order came with the withdrawal of the New Zealand Company in 1850. Given a relatively free hand, the Colonial Government proved far more realistic in addressing the problems of the pastoral districts. Recognising the contribution being made to the infant economy by stockowners, it sought to regulate rather than eradicate. The Government's programme was in two steps. The first was bringing the illegally occupied lands within official ambit through Crown purchase from the Maori owners. This posed few problems at Rangitikei, the lands having been already purchased, and relatively few at Ahuriri, where purchasing was already under way. But the situation in the Wairarapa, where the runholders were most heavily concentrated, was much more delicate. More than three years elapsed before proposals satisfactory to owners, squatters and Government alike enabled east coast purchasing to commence. The second step was the imposition of a licensing system. As an interim measure, the Government made the grazing license system devised for the Auckland districts applicable to the already purchased portions of the southern North Island. Only when acquisition of the eastern pastoral lands was well advanced did the Government take its remedial plan a step further. From early 1854 the purchase of run lands was freely encouraged, while in mid 1855 a completely new set of 'Pastoral Regulations',

specifically formulated for southern North Island conditions, was proclaimed. These afforded a tenure intermediate between freehold and the variable short term rentals formerly prevailing. It was largely on this basis that runs were awarded, and recognised boundaries were drawn up for the first time, in the mid 1850s.

Introduction of the Auckland regulations, under the *Crown Lands Amendment and Extension Ordinance* 1851, had an immediate impact. With licenses securable for an annual fee of £5, but with increments according to the number of stock depastured, there were many attractions for settlers in what were already considered the secondary pastoral districts. No fewer than fifty-three applications were received from illegal occupiers in the first few weeks of operation: seventeen from the Rangitikei, five for holdings round Wellington and Wanganui, and the remainder from Ahurii. Most were satisfactorily accommodated. Certainly, not all were satisfied with the notional grazing acreages bestowed, but, with no serious attempt to define boundaries accurately, this was no insuperable obstacle. For the Government, it was a holding measure. Of more concern to them were concurrent applications from occupiers in the eastern districts, already regarded as the heart of pastoralism. With these they were unable to comply. Purchase of the Wairarapa and East Coast districts proved messy and protracted. With the rentals paid to Maori owners having escalated, there was little inclination by them to relinquish a proven money-spinner. Moreover, the pastoralists, themselves, were not to be underestimated. The confidence of all parties had to be won. As the price of the pastoralists, support, those established were given guarantees of a preemptive purchase right over their homesteads (640 acres rather than the eighty specified in the Ordinance) and precedence as first applicants for licenses once purchasing was accomplished. These were significant concessions. By early 1854, before purchasing had been completed, the applications were banking up.

It was always assumed by the Government that license occupancy would be a shortlived thing. Permitted a breathing space, licensed pastoralists would either utilise their initial advantage to purchase lands of their choice, relinquishing any surplus, or they would move on to newly opened districts. Things did not happen quite like that. Purchasing by pastoralists certainly commenced; but it was very selective. Taking advantage of their preemptive conces-

sions, the former squatters modestly commenced the building up of extensive freehold pastoral properties, homestead purchases being augmented by the addition of strategically located blocks and strips elsewhere on their occupations. A ragged freehold patchwork was thus created. Substantially fewer than 100,000 acres were freeholded in the pastoral districts combined to mid 1855. Over the same period the occupation of more than five times that acreage under pastoral license was sanctioned. It was the overwhelming popularity of rental tenure that provided the Colonial Government with its most difficult problem. Of necessity, licenses continued to be issued under loose arrangements, applicants providing only vague descriptions of the land sought.

The establishment phase of southern North Island pastoralism may be considered to have been brought to an end by the *Amended Land Regulations* of 1855, and by a new carve-up of the pastoral lands under their terms. Despite their cavalier use of the 1851 Regulations, the pastoralists wanted more. They hoped for long-term leases, on terms even more advantageous, and with security of tenure for an extended period: sufficient for them to freehold at their own convenience. Such conditions the Colonial Government was not prepared to concede. But the newly elected Wellington Provincial Government proved much more pliable; not surprisingly considering the strong pastoralist representation in the legislature. Yet, while most of the demands were conceded, pastoralists were required to apply anew for lands. In the Wairarapa and East Coast districts twenty-six licenses were issued, the approved runs ranging in size from 5000-30,000 acres, but with an average of not quite 15000 acres. The Rangitikei was set out in seven runs, between 1800-20,000 acres, but with only one property more than 10,000 acres. Some twenty-eight runs, averaging 10,000 acres were also set out in the Ahuriri. Elsewhere in the southern North Island districts, existing arrangements - both 1851 leases and Maori leases - were preserved. So ended the establishment phase.

For the next decade and a half, with the pastoralists in the political driving seat, the situation might most charitably be described by 'Catch as Catch Can'. Wholesale battles ensued as the pastoralists struggled amongst themselves to consolidate their interests and extend their properties. Only when the greater part of the pastoral lands in the province had irrevocably

passed into private hands were they prepared to switch their attention to improving the forms of stock husbandry practiced. This naturally leads to another question. The primary emphasis has so far been on the pastoral occupation of the southern North Island districts. It is appropriate now to switch attention to the operational characteristics of 'establishment pastoralism'.

### **The Operational Characteristics of Establishment Pastoralism**

Brutally, establishment pastoralism was animal husbandry of the crudest kind. It amounted to little more than the cramming of every procurable sheep on to every available acre - and then doing little more. Elsewhere it has been labelled 'robber pastoralism' to distinguish it from more sophisticated forms of pastoral farming. It might just as aptly be described as 'quarry pastoralism'.

One of the prime attractions of robber pastoralism was the ease of entry into the industry. Whereas the breaking in of a hypothetical 100 acre agricultural block might involve the outlay of £2,500 before even a bushel of seed was sown, a pastoral place could be staked for less than £1000 in the 1840s, little more than £2000 in the early 1850s. The principal expenditure was on livestock. Initially, most of the stock was from Australia, from New South Wales in particular, but also Van Diemen's Land and later Victoria. This preference for Australian supply was partially attributable to a belief Australian sheep would more quickly acclimatise, but also to fear of heavy losses on longer voyages. Even so, losses of more than 50% were not uncommon in trans-Tasman transfers. But the risk was worth it for suppliers. Ewes fetching 7/- to 8/- in Australia could bring 20/- to 25/- landed at Wellington, up to 36/- in peak years. However, from the late 1840s, with supply from local sources growing in volume, prices dropped to around 17/- a head.

Any apparent anomaly between dropping stock supply costs and rising overall establishment costs can be readily explained. As pastoralism became established, other costs necessarily rose. The question of Maori leases has already been referred to. Although analysis of extant leases is in progress (thirteen have been located), the evidence of isolated official cumulations is suggestive. The most consistent results are for the Wairarapa:



EXTRA-LEGAL LEASE OF MAORI LAND IN THE WAIRARAPA

DATE	NEW RUNS	TOTAL RUNS	TOTAL ANNUAL RENT (£)
1844	5	5	84
1845	5	10	120
1846	4	14	168
1847	3	17	325
1848	3	20	609
1849	1	21	588 - 800
1850	2	23	950
1851	1	24	1100 - 1200
1852	3	27	1200

In 1845 £12, on average, was paid. By 1848 this had risen to £30. By 1851 the figure was £50. Thereafter, with the Crown as landlord, assessments became more complicated; although, paradoxically, some became lower. A further steadily increasing outlay was on run labour, even if few employed more than one to two hands. There were few experienced stockmen amongst the early pastoral entrepreneurs. Though some plunged in, the more cautious sought to secure the services of individuals with the requisite knowledge, Scottish shepherds being popular. Such knowledge had to be paid for. Weld, for example, was fortunate to secure the services of Thomas Caverhill in 1844 at £40 p.a. By 1850 considerably more, on average, was being paid. And there was always the prospect of good employees striking out on their own account. Seasonal requirements were met through the casual employment of itinerants or local Maori. There were also always the costs of ancillary services, those provided by the merchant houses of the main town. The conveyance of stores to, and produce from, the occupation sites was expensive, becoming more so as the pastoral advance spread further from the settlement hub. Until the Rimutaka Road was forced through, it was more costly to ship consignments of wool from the Wairarapa to Wellington than to ship those same consignments from Wellington to the

United Kingdom. Finally, the establishment costs for run homesteads should not be overlooked, even if the facilities appeared basic. (see below)

Weld at Wharekaka initially made do with a 30' x 12' bark and reed structure, constructed by local Maori for £25. Rough stockyards were soon added. At Tawanui, Vallance settled for a timber building twenty feet square, but with two small outhouses. His stockyards were 'a small piece fenced in, about 40 or 50 yards square'. Understandably, preparedness to settle for flimsy huts diminished in the course of the late 1840s and early 1850s - but there was always a reluctance to spend heavily until tenure was assured.

Where did this launching capital come from? In the 1840s, and especially in the first half of the decade, private capital, either brought with them by settlers or subsequently remitted by friends and/or family, financed the first pastoral experiments. With the exception of some Australian-based investment, it was not till the mid 1840s, when the initial capital supply was drying up, that local financing attained any great significance. It was at this point that the merchants of Wellington began to build foundations for future commercial empires, and they built in tandem with the pastoralists. Between 1845-48, the years in which pastoralism finally took hold, the level of mortgages slowly climbed, a peak of £20,904 being recorded in 1847. Arguably, the greater part of the monies so raised was channelled into pastoral investments. For those less able to raise a stake in this way, the system of 'thirds' proved advantageous. Under this arrangement capitalists as yet unable, or unwilling, to establish runs on their own account contracted with pastoralists with occupations not fully stocked to run their sheep on a share basis. Whatever the sources, and there were many, capital was available for establishment

Left: Wharekaka c1846

Right: Orui Homestead c1853



purposes, and capital for further expansion readily accrued from clip profits.

As suggested, the husbandry was crude. Owing most to Australian example, the methods employed completely overturned British stock-rearing practices. The stock was simply turned out on to the existing native grasses and ferns. Almost the only concession to pasture improvement was firing of the vegetation cover at height of summer, thereby encouraging the growth of new and palatable shoots. The natural corollary was that stocking rates were generally low. Through the 1840s an average of one sheep to five to six acres was not uncommon. When the Provincial Government allocated runs in the mid 1850s it considered ten acres per sheep an acceptable stocking rate. Clearly, this was wasteful, and it could only be sustained so long as land was cheap and readily available. Stock breeding was no less rudimentary. To be sure, there were exceptions, Bidwill at Pihautea improving his flocks through the importation of rams from the famed New South Wales McArthur stud, while his neighbours Smith and Revans ran a fine line of Durham cattle, but overall the southern North Island districts were no optimum location for stock improvement. Frequently, the sheep imported were heterogeneous in origin and poor in quality; in short, the culls of Australian flocks. Nominally of Merino ancestry, that breed being considered most suitable for unimproved pasture, the strain had often been earlier diluted by crossbreeding. While there was much local debate about the best months for lambing, the question remained academic in the absence of fencing.

The spectacular increase in sheep numbers to 1855 might suggest that those introduced coped remarkably well in the conditions, but it is likely the figures would have been even more impressive but for a range of hazards. Lack of knowledge of climatic conditions, for instance, could prove costly. Uncontrolled breeding ensured that new lambs could be exposed either to the cold and rain of winter or to summer droughts. Arguably, survival of the fittest might have been a positive control, but for individual runholders, the immediate results could be disastrous. Sutherland of Ngaiapu, on the East Coast, records the loss of some 50% of the lambs born in the winter months of 1849. Ignorance of terrain could be equally debilitating. Even the experienced Bidwill lost half his stud flock to flooding in one year. More pernicious were stock diseases. Scab, the scourge of Australian flocks, was first recorded

in the southern North Island districts less than twelve months after the breakout from Port Nicholson. Two years later, in 1847, it was rampant on both coasts. If left untreated, it swiftly spread through whole flocks, the animals losing condition and many succumbing. Less serious in terms of mortality, but little less so in the context of open-range grazing, was footrot, the result of prolonged exposure to damp underfoot conditions. The resulting lameness could only be cured by removal to drier ground, or through constant labour-intensive treatment. Losses of up to 10% per annum were also to be expected from the depredations of wild dogs and feral pigs.

Who, then, were the pastoralists? It is difficult to be precise about those making up the cadre in the Port Nicholson sub-phase, but the evidence suggests that several entrepreneurs with strong Australian links, W.B. Rhodes being a prime example, exercised inordinate influence. As the Company grain mirage turned sour, however, the ranks of the old Australian hands were swollen by disappointed prospective agriculturists. During the years in which the illegal leaseholds predominated, however, the identity of those making up the advance force comes much more clearly into focus. The group was small, less than 200 - men, women and children - by the late 1840s. Those with first-hand Australian experience had become a small minority by this stage, although a number had prior experience of other colonies. Most proprietors were of English origin, with a strong bias towards the southern counties. Conversely, few employees were English, a preference for Scots being exhibited. Possibly this may have been because of the poor Australian record of English shepherds, but the English dominance of proprietorship possibly also reflects greater access to capital. Most proprietors were also relatively young; under thirty-five years. Not all were from wealthy backgrounds, but most were men of education and initiative. Running stock was essentially an upper - and middle class - phenomenon. Here, the Wairarapa provides a microcosm. There were those like Clifford and Weld who were genuinely aristocratic, while Richard Barton was a former senior retainer of the Duke of Sutherland, but more common were recruits from the professional classes: Smith was the Company's deposed Surveyor-General, Revans the settlement's first newspaper editor; Tiffin and Allom were former subordinate survey officers, Pharazyn a former commercial agent

and Kelly a half-pay army officer. Amongst the better-heeled, only Bidwill is known to have been an experienced stockman. The prevalence of such individuals did not mean, however, that the less exalted were completely excluded. Leavening the proprietorial mix by 1847 were McMaster, an ambitious Scots shepherd, and his countryman Gillies, previously employed as drover on the first incursions into the district. By 1855 the composition of the pastoral force was decidedly more mixed, even if honed stock skills were no more apparent on the part of the proprietors. Schedules of the runs awarded in that year indicate that in the Wairarapa seven of the twelve pastoralists *in situ* in 1847 were still in occupation, but they had been joined by nineteen newcomers. These, though still predominantly English, and still comparatively young, encompassed fewer aristocrats, a still substantial professional classes component, and a much stronger representation of mercantile classes. The new mercantile participants ranged in scale from such leading figures as Rhodes and Moore to lesser middlemen like Taine and Spinks. The same trend was discernible on the western coast. Indeed, of the seven graziers granted licenses at Rangitikei, no fewer than four were substantial merchants: Hickson, Waring Taylor, Taylor and Watt of Wanganui, and, most substantial of them all, W.B. Rhodes. So, too, at Ahuriri. It should be noted, however, that the merchant-pastoralists generally chose to conduct their operations from town offices, installing managers on the runs.

Notwithstanding the comparatively gentle origins of many of the pastoralists, and despite the romantic illusions of many entering the business, the successful operation of a run was hard work. Prior to acceptance of the out-station system, which developed as runs grew in size, pastoralists and their employees rode out every two to three days to conduct tentative head counts. Such concern was rendered essential by the rough landscape, stock often wandering to the bush fringe, or becoming entrapped in boggy creek margins. A vigilant eye had to be kept for stock diseases and signs of predators. Moreover, with lambing an all-year activity, assistance was constantly needed. Curiously the 'riding out' held great attraction for many, one young blade describing it as 'the greatest charm in the stockfarmer's life'. In his view, the constant horsemanship gave rise to 'a life of healthy excitement, to which ... even foxhunting must yield.' Sadly, for tender sensibilities, and the

young blade was quick to admit it, once stock had been located, much of the work was out of the saddle; and it was tiresome and dirty.

The most concentrated seasonal activity was shearing, which took place in summer. For days on end there was intense activity, additional labour being employed to assist. The methods were in keeping with the other techniques employed. A drive through a handy stream sufficed to cleanse the fleeces, which were then literally hacked off, the hacking being conducted on open-air benches. Tallies of less than fifty sheep per shearer per day were standard. Little attempt was made to grade properly fleeces on the runs, the wool being generally packed out in fadges to the nearest coastal landing for despatch by sea to the Wellington agents. Once shearing was over, the dry late summer months could be devoted to the clearance of fernland for additional grazing. An arduous undertaking, this was attacked with varying degrees of enthusiasm by individual pastoralists. Only a few initially undertook the full procedure of cutting, burning, grubbing and oversowing; and then only in close proximity to run homesteads. Sown pastures were more commonly related to consumption production than provision of feed for the wool flocks. Milking cows, pigs, and other small stock provided not only for the needs of occupiers, but also sometimes a small surplus for sale. All occupied time. The construction and maintenance of additional buildings, yards and fenced areas also occupied the pastoralist year round, the transition from rough encampment to settled site being a slow process. It was through such rigorous work regimes that the new settlers learned what pioneering pastoralism really involved: the risks, the discomfort, the isolation. In many cases the eagerness of the responses surprised.

Haphazard establishment phase pastoralism may have been and was, beset by problems, but it was also uncommonly profitable for the successful. While detailed accounts and balance sheets for individual runs are sketchy in these early years, there are sufficient clues to reinforce the view. By 1850, after six years operation, Clifford and Weld were anticipating a gross annual return of £6,000 on their enterprises, with a net profit of £4,000. Smith and Revans, heavily in debt in 1845, had by 1847 cleared them, and in their assets for the latter year listed 150 head of cattle and 2000 sheep. At the same time, mortgages on town lands held by the pair had also been cleared. Even sleeping partners and those restricted to 'thirds' did well. In the

late 1840s the Hon. H.W. Petre entrusted £300 worth of sheep to Clifford and Weld's care. In 18 months he received back both his capital and a return of £450 on the investment. Amongst those able to participate, there was an impression that substantial profit could be made even in the first year of a run's operation. By the second, it was believed, net profit might be up to half the gross profit. Even the Company sponsored *N.Z. Journal* endorsed the enthusiasm, suggesting in an 1850 article that the net profit on capital invested in a flock of 500 ewes might be in the order of 70% by the fifth year of operation. The acerbic J.R. Godley, visiting Wellington, was of the opinion that there was: '...no field of investment... in the world that was at once so safe and so profitable'. Wool, of course, contributed most. Not only did flocks increase rapidly, with minimal care they also produced fleeces almost twice the weight of those clipped in Australia. The 25,000 lbs of wool exported in 1845, twelve months after the breakout, had escalated to 562,000 lbs by 1855. The monetary return increased from £1200 sterling to over £32,000. But there were also supplementary income sources. While most pastoralists retained stock for as long as possible for flock expansion, a minor trade in meat stock for the townships and breeding stock for newly formed runs developed. While only a few runs concentrated on cattle, a number ran small herds as a subsidiary interest. Smith and Revans' rapid recovery owed as much to the supply of cattle to the Commissariat during the troubles of 1845-46 as to flock returns. Although beef for slaughter was the principal objective, butter and cheese of dubious quality were also produced for sale, as were wheat and potato surpluses from homestead cultivation. Another cash source was trade with the Maori, consumer commodities being bartered for Maori production for resale. The possibilities were immense.

It is surely symptomatic that senior officers of the New Zealand Company, the most vocal early opponents of pastoralism, were soon themselves investing. By 1851 William Fox, last Principal Agent, and arguably the most vehement local opponent of all, felt able to write that, for many years to come, sheepfarming would be: '... by far the most profitable undertaking in which the colonist...(could)... engage.' Like the adaptable man he was, Fox set out personally to demonstrate the veracity of this new found belief over the next three decades.

## Conclusion

It would be fair to claim that the successful establishment of pastoralism, in particular the running of sheep, ensured the nineteenth-century economic viability of the southern North Island settlements, and at the same time assured the permanence of pakeha settlement. Despite high hopes, by 1843 the Wellington settlement had been in the doldrums. Contemporary settler correspondence reveals a deep pessimism. One visitor was of the opinion that settlement was 'rotten to the core', and that a crash was imminent. By the mid 1850s such doubts had been dispelled. The reason why is self evident. For most of the remainder of the nineteenth century what had become Wellington Province almost literally 'floated on the fleece'. The export figures bear this out. By the early 1860s wool shipments consistently accounted for over 90% of all exports by value, and in one year (1863) 97%. While the relative importance of wool diminished in later decades, thus reflecting the rise of frozen meat and dairy products, significantly also commodities of pastoral origin, it still remained the single most valuable regional export at 1900.

A second concluding point that might be made is that in the course of the pastoral establishment phase a crucial partnership was forged: that between mercantile and pastoral interests. By 1855, it already exercised enormous economic power and was in the process of being translated into political power. In subsequent decades the coalition so formed fundamentally influenced developmental directions in the southern North Island districts. That, however, is a story for another time.

*This paper was given as a seminar at the Stout Centre on 8 August, 1990. A revised and extended version of it, with full documentation, will appear as Chapter six in the writer's forthcoming Wakefield, Wool and Waste Lands: A Study in the Dynamics of Settler Capitalism.*

*Brad Patterson, a resident at the Stout Research Centre in 1991, has taught widely in New Zealand secondary and tertiary institutions, most recently in Victoria University's Economic History Group. He was formerly official historian to the Department of Lands and Survey.*