

The circumstances which led to the occupation of the Ruatoki Valley in pre-pakeha days brought together five or six warring clans, who in the course of time established spheres of influence, that are reflected to-day in some eight or nine villages, most of them on the eastern bank of the Whakatane River. Each clan and village has sought to maintain its identity and prestige, but, in the effort, has made the creation of an efficient central organization for purposes of general utility well nigh impossible.

It is very creditable to the Ruatoki Maoris that in the face of such difficulties they were able to cultivate so much of their lands and to engage and maintain themselves in one of the most exacting of the primary industries. The fences were of poor material and indifferent construction, but were sufficient for the purpose of enclosing and defining pastures; good fences were not possible without good titles. The dairy herds, laboriously built up from the culls of the district and fed on poor pastures, were well below the average in butter-producing capacity. The farm buildings, cow-sheds, yards, and dairy equipment left much to be desired. Maize-growing and the cultivation of food crops without fertilizing had impoverished the soil, and too often no attempt was made to establish pastures after crops, so that the low-producing herds starved through the winter months on corn stubble and weeds. To add to the difficulties, there was a marked increase in the population. The Tuhoe were among the most noted warriors of the old regime, whose boast was "*He kotahi na Tuhoe, e kata te po!*" "One warrior of Tuhoe, and Hades shall laugh!" The rigorous climate, the strenuous conditions of life, and the constant warfare among themselves or against neighbouring tribes, whose territories encircled them, had produced one of the most vigorous tribal stocks in Maoridom. Vigorous and hard physically the Tuhoe tribesman was keen and alert mentally, eminently practical and humorous withal. Where the village communities might have lacked cohesion the discipline of the Ringatu Church, established by Te Kooti among them sixty years ago, had done much to secure co-operation and a common line of attack on the problems imposed by the culture of the pakeha.

Steps were taken to adjust the land titles through a scheme for the consolidation of interests. The scheme progressed so far that, at the end of July, 1929, the consolidation officers reported all necessary data completed. It was submitted, however, that numerous owners, who did not wish to retain locations in the Ruatoki Valley, were pressing to sell their interests to the Crown, and it was recommended that the Crown should buy them out, being for the most part absentee owners, and so enable those owners who were farming at Ruatoki to adjust or enlarge their holdings. In pursuit of this recommendation the Crown purchased interests valued at £4,354. The scheme of consolidation was completed in June, 1931, and under it the purchases made by the Crown were disposed of as follows:—

	£	s.	d.
Definite awards of land	1,087	17	11
Transfer to Waiohau	595	11	7
Interests included in forty-eight Native sections	2,675	4	4
	£4,358	13	10*

* NOTE.—Amount increased by £5 for Court fees outstanding.

During November, 1931, a further adjustment was made by the Department in respect of the interests of the Crown, which had been included in the forty-eight Native sections. The Ruatoki Development Scheme had been undertaken in the meantime, and all the said sections comprised part of it. Loan accounts were opened for the occupiers of these sections, and it was decided to debit the amount of the Crown's interest in each section against the occupier's loan account, a charge being taken in favour of the Crown for the whole of the loan account. The final adjustment was made by a transfer from the item "Native Land Purchases" to the item "Native Land Development" within the Native Land Settlement Account.

The Ruatoki Blocks were brought under section 23 of the Act of 1929 on the 7th April, 1930. Additions were made on the 18th August, 1930, and the 26th May, 1931. At the end of the 1931-32 financial year the total area subject to the Ruatoki Development Scheme amounted to 22,893 acres. Mr. J. D. Rutledge was appointed Farm Supervisor, and commenced his duties early in the 1930-31 financial year.

Subdivisions of Ruatoki Scheme.

The scheme was organized in three sections as follows:—

- (a) Section A, comprising arable flats on both sides of the Whakatane River, being the portions then occupied, farmed, and cultivated. The extent of this section was 4,227 acres 2 roods 26 perches. When the control of the land was vested in the Department it was estimated that the area under fair pasture was 1,194 acres. The Natives had been milking on it for many years, but there was room for improvement in regard to cultivation, fencing, pastures, and stock. It was expected that assistance would resolve itself into terms of fencing-material, seeds, and manure, and young stock of good quality, while the owners and occupiers would be encouraged by the assurance of such assistance to apply their labour, without cost to the Department, to ploughing, draining, top-dressing, and other work.
- (b) Section B, comprising the fern and bushelad hills on the east of Section A. The developable portion of this was estimated at 1,800 acres, which could be brought into pasture by clearing, fencing, and crushing the fern with heavy cattle, followed by sheep. Work on this portion was not considered as urgent as the reconditioning of the pastures on Section A, and the extension of cultivation on the latter area and on parts of Section C. It was anticipated that in a few years the demand would arise for winter pasture on the slopes of the hills and for some sheep-farming to supplement dairying and cropping.