



Angus Macdonald paid £11,000 pounds for The Plains Station in 1920, a princely sum in the day.

Tragedy, hardship,

Richard Loader

Over the past 100 years, the Macdonald's of Te Anau have endured times of hardship, tragedy and volatility along with enjoying success and fulfillment.

Caretakers of the land – future generations will come, maintain and improve upon what has gone before – maybe, because you never know what lies around the corner.

James Macdonald's great-great uncle, Donald Macdonald, arrived in New Zealand with his brother John in 1877, having sailed from their Scottish hometown of Campbeltown on the Kintyre peninsula.

Following positive reports from relatives who had already emigrated, the boys, aged 19 and 18 respectively, made the journey to the new land in search of a life better than what they had left.

And so it was 38 years later in 1915, Donald Macdonald purchased The Plains Station totalling 8519 acres for £3000, with the intention that his son, Donald, would eventually take over the reins.

In the spirit of God, King and Country, young Donald ventured off to fight in WW1 only to be tragically killed in action at the battle of Messines, Belgium in 1917.

That same year Donald's nephew, Angus returned from the Western Front having been wounded on a French battlefield. Donald offered him the opportunity to run the station and Angus moved onto the property in 1918.

Unfortunately before too long, tragedy struck the family again and eldest son Alick became the victim of the influenza epidemic.

Writing to first cousin Angus from Carterhope Station in Balclutha in 1918, Alick said he was very concerned about the epidemic.

Two weeks later Alick was dead; Donald's two sons had been lost through tragedy within the space of 18 months.

By 1920 Angus had paid his uncle £11,000 for the station – a princely sum back in the day – and at this time there were 3600 sheep and 800 lambs.

Through the rigours of tragedy and fate, doors slid open and closed, so that the farm ventured down a different path of the same family bloodline and remains there to this day.

In 1923 Angus, James' grandfather, married Evie Cunningham and the couple had three sons, Hamish, John and Angus – known as David – James' father.

As the world prepared for another major war in 1939 a huge snowstorm swept the Te Anau region lasting weeks on end, with the station losing 2000 sheep and all the cattle out on the hill country.

Fortunately for the Macdonalds fescue was in high demand in the '40s so Hamish, John and David began growing it in vast quantities, enjoying very good revenue.

Fescue grass seed was sown on airstrips in World War 2, as it was very hardy for multiple plane landings.

In 1961, David married Sally Robertson and the couple had three sons, Dougal, James and William but in 1969 tragedy again raised its head when seven-year-old Dougal was accidentally killed while riding a horse at Redcliff Station.

To enable each brother to farm on their own account The Plains Station was split into three properties in 1970 with David and Sally taking over the run end of the station, naming it Davaar Station, after a little Island just off Campbeltown.

"It was a combination of hill country, native tussocks and grasses," explains James. "There were a few fences, no buildings or trees."

The last five decades have been a time of continual development at Davaar Station, culminating in a very functional and structured property.

"Over those 50 years my father, David, undertook a large part of the development – cultivation, fencing, stock shelter and built a woolshed and yards in his tenure," says James.

In 1993 James and his wife Fiona took over Davaar. Today the property runs 6,500 ewes, 1550 hoggets and 530 head of cattle.

In recent years James and Fiona have put in water schemes, shelterbelts, laneways and latterly waterway fencing.

"We are lucky to have the opportunity to involve the family in farming. We're just caretakers, looking after the land and earning a living.

"There will be another generation that comes in behind us, improves it again and continues on – maybe."

James and Fiona have three adult children; Kate 24, Anna 22 and Ben 20, all interested in farming life. "Our son Ben is extremely keen on farming, and is in his second year of a two-year farming cadetship at Smedley in Hawke's Bay."

For the Macdonald's hard work, perseverance and optimism have been fundamental to the success of Davaar Station.

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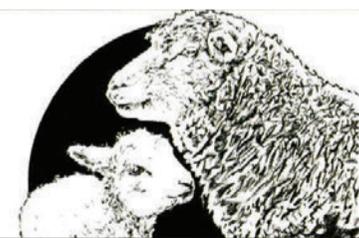
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