

Summary of Heritage Values: Kaupokonui Dairy Co-op Factory and Weir

- The dairy industry is of singular economic and historic significance to the Taranaki area and the Kaupokonui Co-operative was one of the major players eventually becoming – via the Kiwi Dairy Co-operative - a part of the present national dairy company – Fonterra.
- The former Kaupokonui Co-operative Dairy Company factory complex is one of the few, if not the only, remaining Taranaki 20th century dairy complexes in anything like its original configuration.
- It is our contention that the use of hydro-electric schemes by individual dairy factories was a feature of the industry largely confined to Taranaki because of its topography, numerous high energy streams and substantial rainfall.
- The weir, water-race and turbine for producing hydro-electric power for the factory is one of the only remaining such complexes in Taranaki – a region that pioneered hydro-electric generation in New Zealand.
- The weir was rebuilt in 1941 by Alois ('Lou') Butler of Inglewood a well-known Taranaki bridge builder, engineer, entrepreneur and inventor. This is his first (and only?) dam and, as such, an important example of his work.
- The dam and its associated structures forms an important part of New Zealand's industrial heritage.
- The need to ensure fish passage around the weir is acknowledged as the original fish pass is not operable for all species.

APPENDIX 1

Kaupokonui Dairy Co-operative Dairy Factory Complex and Hydro-electric Scheme

The proposal is part of a classic – and important - Taranaki dairy factory and its associated hydro-electric scheme consisting of a concrete weir on the Kaupokonui Stream, a tunnel and water race to the generating shed alongside the factory complex.

The weir is some 200 metres upstream and linked to the factory site by a tunnel and concrete water-race which runs along under the true right scarp of the stream. The factory complex lies alongside the Kaupokonui Stream at its intersection with SH 45.

Weir and Power Scheme:

Originally constructed: 1900

Separate power house built and generators replaced: 1940

Weir rebuilt in 1941

Electricity generation ceased: 1960-61

Dairy Factory:

Date designed: c1910 *et seq*

Date construction begun: 1911

Date construction completed: mid-1911

Date formally opened: 1911?

Date of any alterations or significant modifications (plus details):

A number of subsequent additions and alterations were made as the company expanded or introduced new technology. There was a major re-building in 1952.

Amalgamated with T. L. Joll Co-operative to form Kiwi Co-operative Dairies Ltd:
1963

Factory closed: 1975

The Kaupokonui Dairy Company:

Taranaki's soils and climate are ideally suited to dairy farming, and the region is one of the most productive and efficient in the world. From the first days of Pakeha settlement, many farmers kept one or two dairy cows for supplying milk, butter and cheese to their immediate family.

The invention of refrigerated shipping in the 1880s saw Taranaki's dairy industry become firmly established. Since then, dairy farming has formed the basis of Taranaki's economy and has made a major contribution to the region's social structure.

The Kaupokonui Dairy Co-operative Company Ltd was one of the foremost players in the founding and evolution of the present New Zealand co-operative dairy industry. The Kaupokonui factory was the central headquarters of the extended company which covered much of the Waimate Plains of south Taranaki.

The factory was established in 1897 and quickly built up an impressive network of surrounding branches.

“Some idea of the rapid development of the company can be gathered from the fact that during its first year the company received milk from 600 cows, but at the end of the first seven years of the company’s existence the number had increased to 7000.”
Richards (1995)

In 1910 the original wooden factory was destroyed by fire and replaced by a concrete building in time for the following new season (mid-1911). This building now forms the heart of the present complex which has had substantial additions over the years as the company expanded or upgraded the premises. A major reconstruction was completed about 1952.

By the 1950s, with seven major branches - Waiokura, Auroa, Oeo, Skeet Road, Sutherland Road, Katua and Kapuni – the Kaupokonui Co-op was a major force in the Taranaki dairy industry. The amalgamation with its main south Taranaki competitor, the T. L. Joll Co-operative in 1963, formed Kiwi Dairies Ltd. In 1992 Kiwi merged with the north Taranaki giant, Moa-nui, and then, during the following years with many other companies in the southern North Island and South Island.

In 2001 they merged with the Waikato-based NZ Dairy Group to form Fonterra.

The Kaupokonui Dairy Co-op Hydro Scheme

Of the first 14 publicly available electricity supplies in New Zealand, seven were in Taranaki. Most of these were hydro-electric schemes, based on the seasonally consistent water supply provided by Taranaki/ Mt Egmont’s many streams. Because of this accident of topography, we believe that this extensive early use of hydro-power for both public and commercial enterprises may well be restricted to, and therefore unique to, Taranaki.

Many of the dairy factories established here during the late 19th and early 20th centuries had often to ensure their own consistent power supply. This could either be by mechanical waterwheel, Pelton wheel or small turbine and generator. The method chosen usually depended largely on the size and wealth of the co-operative.

In 1900, the Kaupokonui Co-operative Dairy Co-operative Co. began a water supply and electricity scheme with a dam across the Kaupokonui Stream two kilometres or so above the factory. A 200 metre tunnel and open concrete race brought water to two turbines and generators under the factory engine room. In 1940 the generators were replaced and installed in a separate power-house.

The weir was rebuilt in 1941 by Alois (Lou) Butler of Inglewood a well-known Taranaki bridge builder, engineer, entrepreneur and inventor. This is his first (and only?) dam and, as such, an important example of his work.

The plant supplied electricity to the factory, store and company dwellings nearby. It continued to operate until 1960-61 when an alternative supply was provided by the South Taranaki Electric Power Board as the hydro scheme could not supply complex's increased demand.

The Taranaki Dairy Industry

The Taranaki dairy industry is the area's main industry and has been so for at least the last 120 -130 years

The dairy industry is of singular economic and historic significance to the Taranaki area and the Kaupokonui Co-operative was one of the major players eventually becoming – via the Kiwi Dairy Co-operative - a part of the present national dairy company – Fonterra.

“After the Northland Co-operative Dairy Company amalgamated with Kiwi, the industry had two dominant companies left in the late 1990s, each based in one of the great national dairying regions: Kiwi in Taranaki and the New Zealand Dairy Group (NZDG) in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty.” McLauchlan (2006)

In the years following World War I and before the stifling effects of the Depression, the settlement pattern in southern Taranaki became characterised by small communities growing up around the dairy factories. These were mostly situated at rural crossroads and, where possible, near streams which usually provided power – by water wheel or electric generator - for the plants.

These factories varied in size from small, single units like Tirimoana, which in 1922 had only 17 suppliers, to large complexes such as Kaupokonui which, in the same year, was serviced by seven subsidiary branches with a total of 280 suppliers.

By the 1920s the tiny Waimate West County, based on Manaia, was the most densely populated rural area of New Zealand.

From the 1950s on many of these rural communities declined after the factories amalgamated.

“The late 1950s saw the approaching demise of the small factories. Rural communities slowly, one by one, were robbed of their identities by dairy company amalgamations. After the factory closed, the locals lost their local store and the country halls fell into disuse; the close relationship between farmers and factory workers slid out of sight.” Tinsley (1985)

Today there are few – if any - of Taranaki's many former dairy factory complexes remaining in such “complete” form as this one at Kaupokonui. The Kaupokonui complex is, therefore, a singularly important remnant of a rural Taranaki lifestyle now long-gone.

The factory complex represents the end result of 110 years of technological development of the dairy industry in New Zealand. It closed as the direct result of global economic trends and the continued search for commercial efficiency in the industry.

The dairy industry is of extraordinary importance to the Taranaki area. It has formed the backbone of the local economy for the last 100 years. Taranaki's soils and climate are ideally suited to dairy farming, and the region is one of the most productive and efficient in the world. From the first days of Pakeha settlement, many farmers kept one or two dairy cows for supplying milk, butter and cheese to their immediate family.

The invention of refrigerated shipping in the 1880s saw Taranaki's dairy industry become firmly established. Since then, dairy farming has formed the basis of Taranaki's economy and has made a major contribution to the region's social structure.

Amalgamation and automation has seen the small farms and factories of the 1920s and 30s replaced by larger farms and massive milk processing plants. Fonterra, which handles most of Taranaki's milk, is one of the world's largest dairy companies.

While the last few decades have seen the immediate social impact of the dairy industry lessen, in the early decades small rural communities were centred specifically around their dairy factory. The factory, with its managers and workforce, formed a closely knit social group with the workers often housed locally in company dwellings. These communities usually also had a school, hall and a general store (often part of the factory).

A superb 'fictional' account of the social history, anecdotes and folklore associated with the operation of Taranaki cheese factories like Kaupokonui is available in Tinsley's *The Cheese-puncher's Ball* (1985)

"Within these factories worked and fought the hardest, craziest, funniest and oddest bunch of hacks the dairy industry ever saw. Some of them, taken straight off the street by a labour-starved industry, were at first absolutely useless but most learned quickly and stayed on to become the pool of regular labour that the industry depended on."
Tinsley (1985)

The dairy industry has been one of the country's most enduring industries and its products remain a major export for New Zealand.

Taranaki has been, for the past 150 years, one of the two (with the Waikato) prime dairying areas of the country.

Few of Taranaki's 20th century dairy complexes now remain in anything like original condition. The present complex is one of the few that does. It exhibits the development of the dairy industry over the 20th century in particular, with the many additions and alterations made during that time as the industry expanded. It therefore represents a successful, dynamic company which was able to adapt to the changes in

the dairy industry which, indeed, still survives as a part of the present company, Fonterra.

Cheese factories, during much of the 20th century, were the economic and social heart of rural communities. When delivering milk daily, it was here that farmers met, talked politics and sport, argued, exchanged ideas, and discussed changes and concepts in farming practise. The factory also provided employment for locals who were able to sustain a local commerce such as general stores, motor garages/service stations as well as community organisations such as churches, public halls and sports clubs.

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