

Flinders Island War Service Land Settlement as Experienced by Lex Dalglish and Family

We were beginning to wonder where this existence of milking a few cows was taking us. I heard a rumour that some areas on Flinders Island were being prepared for Soldier Settlement. My enquiries confirmed that this was so. In addition, I found out that if a prospective settler was prepared to work on the development of farming areas, then he would be considered for early settlement when the properties became viable. All this my wife, Eve, and I decided to do. We had been married eleven years and had children, Penny eight and Ross five years old.

And so, in late December we flew to Flinders, where we were met at the Airport by the works manager Mr Bill Melrose. I should have mentioned that the Agricultural Bank of Tasmania was the Agent in Tasmania for the Commonwealth War Service Land Settlement Division. Mr Melrose dropped us off at the Interstate at Whitemark, the 'Capital' of Flinders, where we were immediately adopted by the wife of the licensee, Mrs Peg Aitken, a very dear lady of whom we became very fond.

To digress for a moment. My father's father and family left the town of Galashiels in Scotland in 1884 and travelled to Tasmania in a vessel named "Gulf of Carpentaria". Also, on board this ship was the Aitken family from the same district. I believe this family settled on the Northwest coast of Tasmania.

The Interstate Hotel licensee was Vere Aitken, a descendant of this family. There were also two brothers on the Island, Reg and Don. Furthermore, we are the proud owners of a mahogany long case clock of which the dial is inscribed: "AITKEN GALASHIELS". This fine old clock was brought out of Scotland by my grandfather and is still in good running order. But to continue. We stayed at the hotel pending the arrival of our furniture from Tasmania which it did at the end of the year, when we moved into a three roomed cabin, one of five or so at "Windy Hollow", which was at the south end of Whitemark. And I was ready for work.

At 7am on the first working day of 1954 I was picked up from 'Windy Hollow' along with other workman and driven by a rough dirt road to the works depot at Summer Camp.

This area was the Furneaux Estate and was later to be known as Memana. I am not certain of the number of settlements, but it was considerable. It was about a twenty kilometre drive to Summer Camp and there was to be found a large workshop, power generation shed, mess hall, kitchen, a number of two bedded huts, ablution block, toilets, a small shop (privately run), time office and fuel depot. There were also some married quarters- same as 'Windy Hollow'. There was a very good supply of fresh water from Summer Camp creek.

The workman at Summer Camp were supplied with a good breakfast, a cut lunch and a hot evening meal. The evenings were spent playing cards etc. I do not recollect any alcohol in the camp at any time. It was probably banned anyway. From memory all catering and accommodation was supplied free, and there was transport to Whitemark two or three evenings a week. The working week was fifty hours in five days starting at 7.30 am, a half hour break for lunch, and finishing at 5pm. Wages were from memory about 40 to 45 Pounds per week. On finishing work on Friday evening, all people living at 'Windy Hollow' were transported back there to spend the weekend with their families. As far as I am aware I was the only prospective settler to have lived at Summer Camp prior to being allocated a holding. What an experience!

On arrival at Summer Camp that first morning I reported to the Time Office. The foreman tossed a bunch of keys and instructed me to 'take that truck over there and transport those men to their work sites'. Well, I had never driven a five-ton truck before, I didn't have a licence to drive one anyway, and I didn't understand the transmission either. The man sitting next to me in the driver's cab said to me "you don't know how to drive this truck do you?" I admitted guilt, and he kindly instructed me and all was well.

These men were nearly all tractor drivers, and they were employed logging and clearing the native scrub and trees, windrowing and stacking the resulting rubbish. Later of course, the country was cultivated, sown to pasture, and fenced out into individual holdings. My initial holding was a bit over 500 acres but was later increased a bit. When I first started working on the estate, the first five thousand acres had just been ploughed.

After a couple of months or so, I was put to work on a Bedford tip truck. The main roads were in the process of being formed and from memory about four or five tip trucks were used to cart decomposed granite from the 'Gravel Pit' along what was Number 5 Road. This gravel was dumped on the site, and the road was formed using a Caterpillar grader. Later on, I was employed driving a Traxcavator, this was a D4 Caterpillar with a bucket in front to scoop up a load of gravel and dump it into a tip truck.

Unfortunately, we did not keep any records or diaries at this time, and after nearly fifty years dates and time become very hazy so I must request forgiveness in this respect.

My next employment found me in charge of a pasture seeding gang. I forgot to mention that during my truck driving days I was, at times, moving bagged superphosphate from Whitemark jetty to storage sheds in the farming areas. There were several of these sheds being Nissen huts built on a concrete base. This work continued through the year, ahead of the spring sowing. Back to the pasture sowing. I think the sowing may have gone on for six days a week to be sure of keeping ahead of the weather. Superphosphate plus trace elements of copper and cobalt was sown with English Rye Grass, White Clover and Mount Barker sub clover. I can't remember what quantities were used, but I can say that much later in 1968 super was 44.30 Pounds per ton and my very brief

records show that I used 32 tons of copper/cobalt Super and 11 tons of plain super that year.

The spring and summer sowings completed. I found myself in charge of the Time Office and I took the opportunity to move my bed there, as I preferred being on my own. The petrol bowser was close by, and it was part of my duty to keep all motor vehicles fuelled up, record how much on a weekly report each vehicle used. I also kept a check on what lubrication oils were used. Time sheets were also collated, and all this information was lodged with the office in Whitemark. This was a pleasant time, no stress or worry, and I was more or less my own boss. The Time Office consisted of two rooms, one of which was used for staff meetings, and so I got to know the administration.

All this time I had kept to myself my naval wartime activities. But somehow or another it became known that I had, among other duties, been a navigation officer. So, my final work for the Bank was decided, and I became Surveyor's Assistant and then Charting Officer. The work of the Charting Officer required the preparation of a chart showing each week's progress on the project, that is, the acreage of all logging, windrowing, clearing, ploughing harrowing and finally seeding. I was provided with a Land Rover, and a chainman was assigned to help me. All of this latter part happened after the surveyor left. The charting was easy. The chainman and I went to the site to be measured. We started from the end of the previous week's work, which was marked by a papered stick, and the chainman moved along the edge of the new week's work. The "chain" was flat steel tape about five millimetres wide, wound on a reel. It was five chains long and graduated. Five chains are about 100 metres. The chainman marked his position, I read the angles between the markers, and we moved on to the next five chains. On return to the office all this fieldwork was transferred to paper. The charting office was at Survey Camp, about four or five miles southeast of Summer Camp. I make a point that I had no hand in the survey of the blocks.

During the latter part of my employment, I received notice that I was to have first pick of the first nine block at Memana to be settled. When this was, I am uncertain, but at a guess I'd say it was in the mid-fifties. By this time there were nine houses completed, and they were comfortable three bed roomed with kitchen, bathroom (with chip heater), laundry, toilet and front porch. Initially a community-shearing shed was built, but the impracticability of this was soon recognised, and shearing sheds were built on each block.

We named our farm "Dallen" being the first syllable of my name, and the last syllable of Eve's maiden name - Allen. The blocks were on leasehold, and the annual rent was \$1,000 plus and annual municipal rate \$400. After living in cramped quarters at 'Windy Hollow' and later in similar conditions at Summer Camp, it was great to be living in a normal and comfortable house again, even though we had no power initially, and cooking was done on fuel stove. As time went on, we replaced the black fuel stove with

an Easy slow combustion stove, which provided 200 litre hot water service. The next improvement was a four K.W. Lister 240v. electric plant which was placed in the barn workshop. The final addition was a garage, shearer's room and outside laundry and shower.

The opportunity to have first pick of the blocks was a very unexpected bonus. The question was which one? We finally settled on Lot One. This was about fifteen kilometres from Whitemark, on the west side of Number 1 Road on the Furneaux Estate. It was at the lower end of Dick Iles Gully, and under the lee of Badger Hill, from which we obtained firewood. There was also the possibility of spring water in the gully, which we frequently found, and which was a vast improvement on the bore water produced by the two windmills on the farm. These mills pumped water to two concrete reservoirs to be then reticulated over the farm. The bore water had a very high content of sulphuretted-hydrogen, which made it totally unsuitable for use in the house. I subsequently had a dam constructed in one of the higher gullies, and this water was used for all stock purposes and the garden. Later on, we also had a concrete tank at the shearing shed for additional house water.

With nine families now settled, school transport became necessary. There was only one school, Whitemark Area School at Whitemark. The project management initially provided transport, but as settlement increased, Mr L. C. Walker supplied a school bus service, and mailbag service. At my wife's instigation we finally got a phone service which was a party line.

I constructed all our internal fencing. The stock was about twice as long as wide so a centre lane had paddocks running off it. I later adopted a system of "set stocking" of the sheep flock, and this proved quite successful. After setting, various paddocks were stocked at the rate of five ewes per acre. They were Corriedales and there they stayed right through the year until the next shearing. We ran Angus cattle and milked a house cow until the children went to Tasmania to High School and College.

We were one of the first to start shearing in the New Year, a very busy time for all of us. There were two electric shearing stands and we employed a wool classer as well. As the children became older, they were employed and they earned enough pocket money for the year.

In the late sixties I selected some crown land surrounding the southwest of the allotment and fronting on Number 1 Road. I sold this to another settler when we left the island. Early in my tenancy, a further acreage was added round the northeast side of Badger Hill.

The mid 1960's found my wife and self on our own. After finishing High school, Penny started nursing at the Royal Hobart, and Ross went to sea as a cadet deck officer with Australian National Lines. He stayed with this company for twenty-one years gaining his

Foreign Going Master Mariner Certificate of Competency. We involved ourselves in various pastimes. There was golf, fishing, swimming, C.W.A., Tasmanian Farmer's Federation, some Committee work and Flinders Show Society. All of this made for a very contented lifestyle.

So it was that in 1972 after long consideration, we decided to sell the lease. The sale eventuated and we departed, with a degree of sadness on 30th June 1973. We moved back to Hobart where I secured employment until 1976 when I suffered a heart attack.

The farming life had its bad times, of course, but were far outweighed by the good days and good times. It was as well we left when we did having regard to the ill health that lay ahead of me. We remember our days on Flinders Island with fondness, the great friendships which continue to the present day.

Received from Lex Dalglish in September 2002, aged 87



Lex passed away at age 87