



**Weaners in the 'lolly paddock' at Richard De Herrera's Mangapoiki Deer Farm**

*These animals were being prepared, at the time of TDF's visit, for showing at the Deer Pavilion during the recent Gisborne A&P Show*

## East Coasters: A breed apart

Coming to terms with isolation and a harsh summer climate

TO THE rest of the country, Poverty Bay probably means Cyclone Bola and summer droughts that often carry on through winter.

Nightly in summer, the rest of New Zealand can sit in its living room and watch Gisborne top the TV temperature charts — scarcely sparing a thought that this means browning which slowly but inexorably spreads its way up from the coast.

Hikurangi, they say, is the first mountain in the world to see the light of day. So what keeps these East Coasters hanging on in, shall we say, less than ideal conditions?

Firstly, they are a breed apart. And not the least of their attributes is a never-say-die fatalism equal in size to the East Cape itself.

by Frank Fyfe

They're big-hearted, too. Their isolation (it's four hours in any direction to anywhere!) has imbued them with a spirit not only of warm friendliness, but also of co-operation.

For the East Coasters know perhaps better than anybody else that to help your neighbour is also to help yourself.

In some ways it's a continuation of the old pioneering spirit that opened this country up. A dogged determination to make a go of it — come Bola or high water.

And they've had years to come to terms with their environment; Gisborne, after all, was where Cook first set foot, and Turanganui, as it

was originally called, was settled very early on.

Each of the valleys that run up from the coast is dotted with grand old homesteads founded on the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle that roamed the higher hinterland.

Coastwards on the valley floors, it's all horticulture these days — vintners' grapevines; acres and acres of tomatoes destined to be locally processed into paste for acres and acres of Italian pasta; orchards of luscious oranges; and, although not a few of them are coming out, kiwifruit.

East Coasters are even talking about an export cut flower industry, providing they can solve the distance problem. ▶

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And then there's maize. Long-time Coasters say that living memory contains not one instance of a maize crop failing. This is the rock upon which Poverty Bay deer herds are anchored; an article of faith that keeps the high wire creeping up the valleys.

Another article of faith, that deer farmers up this way are determined should remain a truism, is that there never has been a recorded instance of Tb in any Poverty Bay deer herd.

The weather may be tough in summer, but generally it's really kind in winter. Winter on the East Coast, locals say, is a joke and marked only by the trees losing their leaves.

The grass keeps growing, and this means earlier fawning from hinds in top condition. It also means early velvetting — weeks if not months ahead of other regions.

These are some of the reasons why the 'average' Poverty Bay deer farm is stabilising at around 700 animals.

There are bigger farms of course, like Cecil Brown's higher, wetter property at Matawai, or Marcus Williams' coastal property at Tolaga Bay.

And there are smaller units such as Don and Anne Avenell's 180 acre, 130 hind farm at Patutahi or any of the half-dozen or so 25-30 hind lifestyle blocks creeping up the valleys close to Gisborne.

### Herd numbers

Poverty Bay Deer Farmers Association branch chairman Buff Trafford estimates that there are now more than 100 deer herds in the area from Wairoa in the south to just short of Opotiki in the north.

These include a few lifestyle blocks, sheep and beef farms with a few diversification deer, and fulltime deer farms. Of the latter, some 65 are members of the association.

But even Buff Trafford can be caught out — like on the day we were driving up the Rere into the Wharekopai Valley, and rounded a corner to come face to face with some shiny new deer fencing.

"Hell, I didn't know there was anyone here," Trafford said, only to catch his breath over another new farm two minutes later.

"Perhaps I should come up here more often, a man never knows what he might find!"

Nevertheless, Buff Trafford is of the opinion that growth in the industry



**NZDFA Poverty Bay branch chairman Buff Trafford and branch secretary Anne Avenell look over Gisborne Show entries**

*They're two of Poverty Bay's '12 apostles' of deer farming*

on the East Coast will be from existing deer farmers expanding rather than from large numbers of new entrants.

"I'm not saying that's the way it should be. I believe that deer could be the saviour of many, if not most, of the Bola affected coastal properties," he says.

### On their own

"Look at it this way. Up around the Cape there is a real erosion problem. We've had three Prime Ministers fly over the area in the past 12 months. Each of them has shaken his head, admitted that there is a helluva job to do and gone away muttering that something must be done.

"But we know that we are on our own. Sure the Bola relief measures were appreciated — that's what kept most of us from walking away. But from here on... well, I believe that deer farming is the only thing that can do it. Deer and trees!

"Most of the farms up there are what? About 2000 acres? If they



**Terry Sutton**

*An independent agent, a deer farmer & a Poverty Bay patriot*



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were reduced to productive, lucrative deer farms of around 500 to 1000 acres and the rest planted in trees, you just might be able to save most of that land from slipping into the sea!"

Trafford is one of the original 'twelve apostles' who launched into farming captured deer in 1978. Today Buff and Joy farm 420 deer on 200 effective acres on both sides of the Waipaoa River at Te Karaka — up the Waioeka Gorge road from Gisborne to Opotiki.

Most of his Te Rangatira (named, he jokes, long before he became local DFA head serang!) flats were "re-topsoiled when the river rampaged through here after Bola".

Trafford estimates that about a third of all local deer farms were directly affected by the Waipaoa, and up to half by other 'streams'.

Another who also farms up the Waipaoa Valley is locally respected independent (though allied to Elders) deer agent Terry Sutton. Along with Wrightson's Pete McGrannachan and Williams and Kettle's Morrie Springer, Sutton services the whole Poverty Bay districts (Buff Trafford estimates that he has 75 per cent of the local deer business).

Sutton is not only personally committed to deer — sharefarming 250 hinds and 100 velvetting stags at his Sunnydene Park north of Te Karaka — he's also a real Poverty Bay patriot.

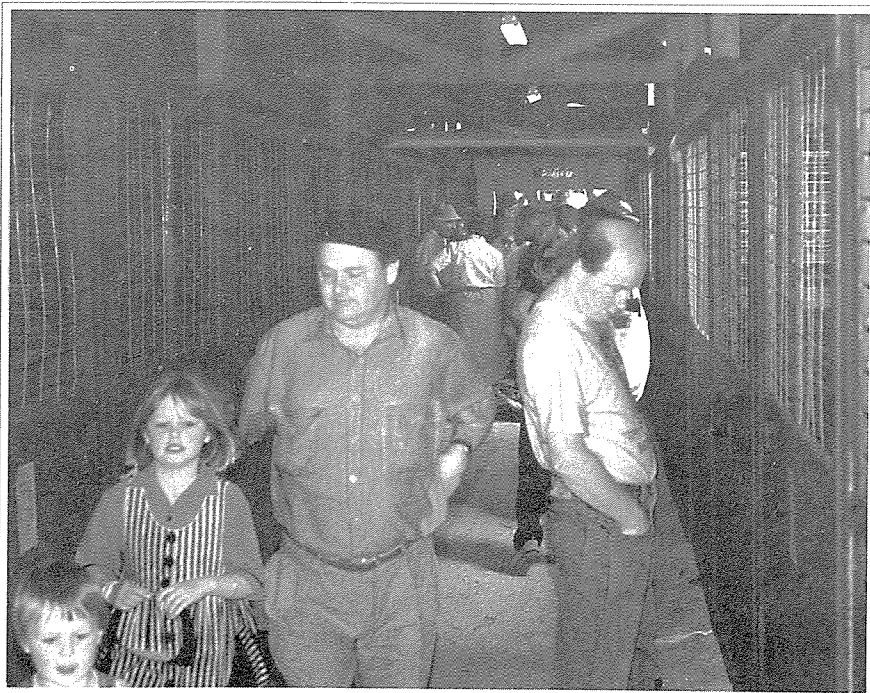
### Deer promotion

He has strong A&P Society connections, and with DFA committee-man John Foley he was the brains behind the big deer promotion at last month's Gisborne Show.

This was a promotion that should be the envy of other NZDFA branches throughout the country. It took place in a newly refurbished 'Deer Pavilion', and GIB chairman Tom Williams visited to judge the best of more than 100 deer on show.

While Sutton, Trafford, Foley and local NZDFA secretary Anne Avenell (with husband Don another of the original 12) are all hopeful that the show could develop into a sort of 'Royal Deer Show', the guts of the promotion seen by hundreds was as simple as it was effective.

They'd wheeled a brand-new Ford Laser into the pavilion and attached a notice to its \$22,000 price tag: "To buy this you would need to sell 840



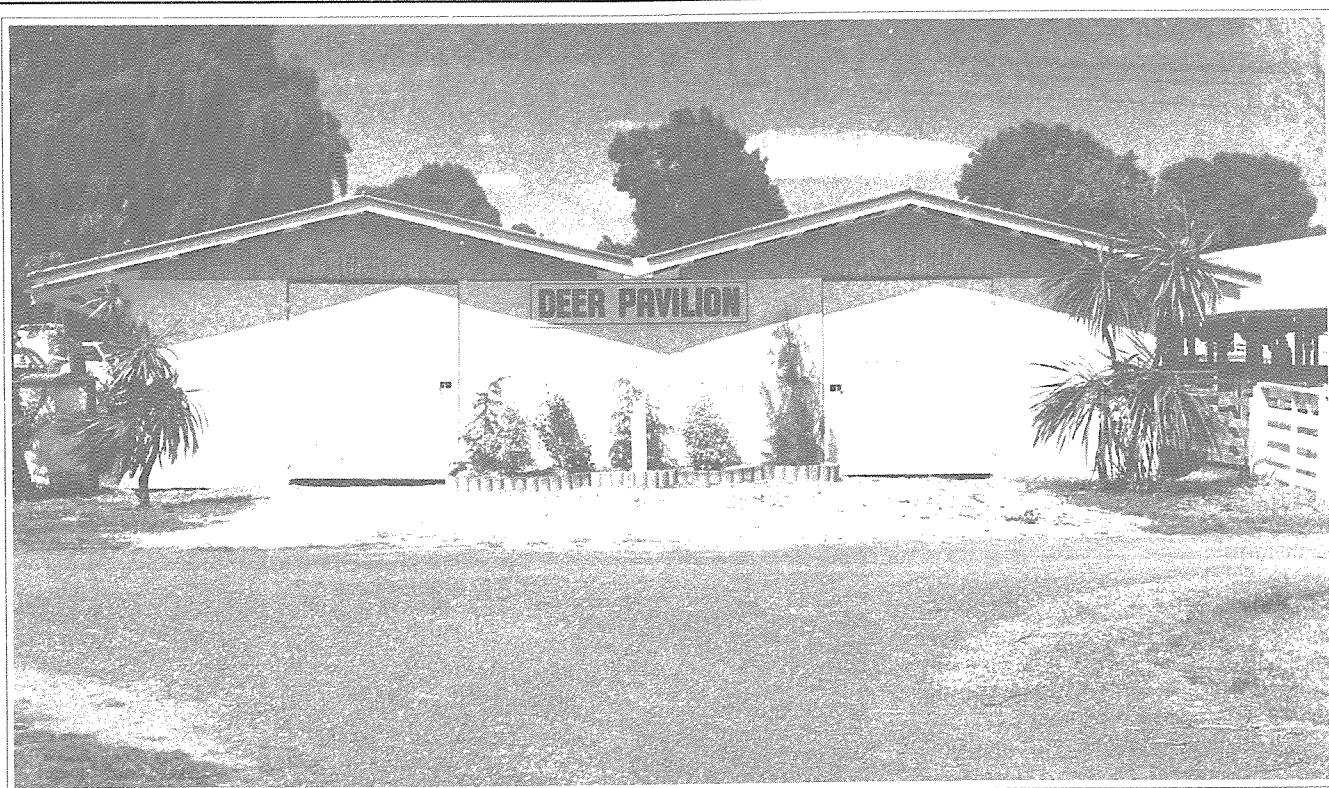
lambs or 30 steers. You could also pay for it from the produce of 28 velvetting stags. Of all these animals, only the stags would remain to help you buy next year's model!"

Says Sutton: "It's hip-pocket appeal to farmers who know that we all up here are on second and third-class country, and we're fooling ourselves if we think otherwise.

"We did try to show that local deer can produce a top product, and that they're here to stay."

Certainly, this message has already been taken aboard by the Poverty Bay Hill Country Farmer of the Year for 1990, Rick Spencer, and his colleague from the year before, Bernard Hartnett. Both have put in deer units.

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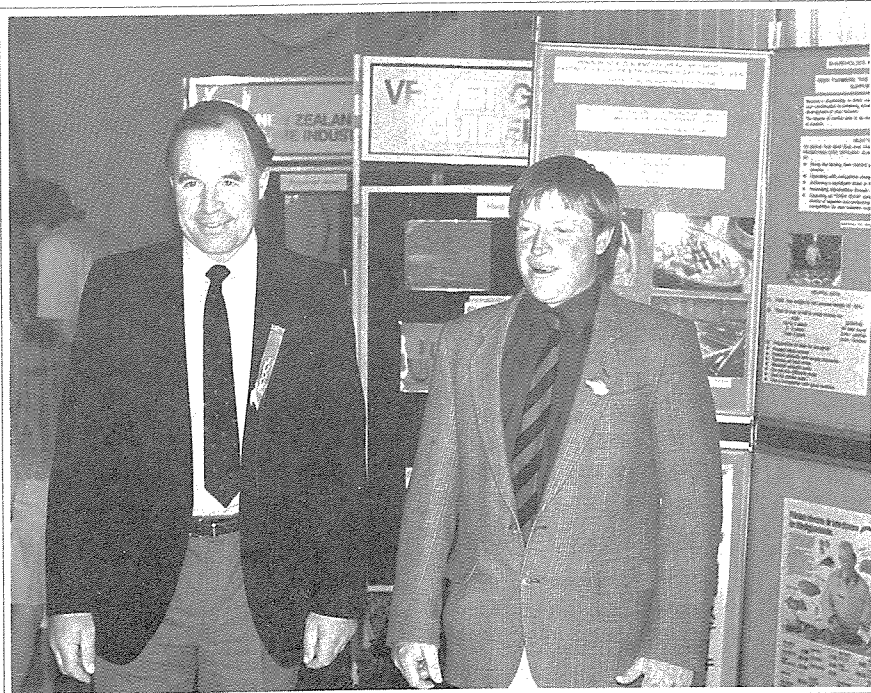
Poverty Bay deer farmers' refurbished 'deer pavilion' attracted an estimated 2-3000 visitors at the recent Gisborne A&P Show.

More than 100 deer were shown in the pavilion's 21 pens over the two days of the show, says the NZDFA Poverty Bay branch president Buff Trafford.

Buff Trafford says the A&P Society provided the finance for the refurbishment, but it was the local deer farmers who did all the work.

The pavilion was opened by GIB chairman Tom Williams, pictured at right with branch committee member John Foley. With Terry Sutton, Foley was the brains behind the deer promotion.

Photos by Harvey Lodge.



So what keeps these East Coasters grafting away behind God's shoulder (in terms of the weather)?

After visiting half a dozen farms, ranging from the more coastwards Avenells', through to the "average, commercial Poverty Bay hill country unit" at Wairere and the "almost stud, almost perfect" Mangaopuiki, I've found that the answer is dollars.

Anne Avenell: "Profit-wise, and for the least inputs even on marginal country, deer has to be the best!"

Terry Sutton: "We get a thumping good fawning, and that's money in the bank."

Buff Trafford: "Poverty Bay is early country — early velvet and, providing you keep the supplements up, early away to the works."

In the more homespun vernacular of former head shepherd and now Wairere's deer unit manager Barry Griffin, deer "beat the hell out of maggot-taxis".

All of that, of course, and a lifestyle that includes cruising for big-game fish, surfing or if you prefer just lazing by the pool quaffing the local vintage. □