# Pureora Forest Village and Its Community, 1945–87

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D.J. Gaukrodger, N.A. Ritchie and C.M. King

**Abstract**

Pureora Forest village was designed by the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) as a planned logging settlement, to provide a stable long-term future and good housing conditions for the workforce. This chapter describes the establishment of the village from 1945; the people and the social organisations they created; and the officers of the milling companies and of NZFS who were in charge. The stories of life in the village during its prime, and of how the community developed in isolation, of the children, the schools, the Football Club (both the players and the bar), the volunteer fire brigade, the sly-groggers, the ambulance, are all previously unpublished, genuine solid-gold social history, contributed by people who lived there and who recorded their first-hand memories on tape.

**Keywords**

Planned logging settlements · Rural community life · Barryville · Pureora Forest village · Social history of the timber industry · Prohibition in the King Country · Pureora Volunteer Fire Brigade · Sawmill fires · Wood chopping competitions · Inia Te Wiata · New Zealand House pouihi · Logging accidents

The most vivid first-hand descriptions of a place can come only from the people who actually lived there. Fortunately for anyone interested in the history of Pureora, the archive at the Department of Conservation (DOC)'s Hamilton office contains boxes of tapes and transcriptions of interviews, organised and conducted in the late 1990s by former OC John Gaukrodger and researcher Owen Wilkes with many of the people who lived at Pureora from its earliest days—including four of the longest-serving OCs [18].

In addition, NZFS required each OC to keep a detailed Station Log and to make Annual Reports

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on their operations. Owen and John summarised relevant details from these and other sources (e.g., file notes and official correspondence) into a single document. All this, plus additional information from DOC archaeologist Neville Ritchie and John Gaukrodger, amounts to a detailed and authentic chronology of the birth, life and decline of the Pureora Forest village [19]. The descriptions in this chapter are based on extracts from this wonderfully rich and revealing material, most of it never before published.

## Construction of the Village

In 1940, the Te Kuiti Forestry office began to plan the establishment of the village at Pureora designed to house timber workers and forestry officers, plus roads and all the other necessary facilities. The site chosen for the village was inspected in November 1944 by the Housing Department. The following year Forest Service architect Lew Hahn arrived in Te Kuiti to manage the project [2: 132]. Approval was given by Head Office to locate seven 8′ × 10′ army huts at the E&B Pukemako camp (Chap. 5; Fig. 7.3) as temporary single mens' quarters to accommodate builders working on house construction at Pureora.

A roading survey was completed by Geoff Collett, NZFS District Ranger at Te Kuiti, and by March 1945, 18 miles of line had been cut, and the main extraction routes for working the first 2500 acres of SF96 were defined. Crawler tractors were unloaded, and in May the rough road to the village site and No. 1 skid were completed. Logging started almost immediately, to help alleviate a critical post-war shortage of building timber.

From the outset there were labour shortages. Expert dozer drivers and qualified tradesmen, especially mechanics and builders, did not want to work in the backblocks when easier work was readily available in the cities and towns. Labour for general forestry work in the seedling nursery and tree crop teams was also hard to get.

By the end of October 1945, the village area had been levelled and roads formed by dozer driver Bruce Archer; paddocks had been tilled and grassed; trees planted for ornamental and shelter purposes, fences erected, a telephone link to Benneydale established, permanent single men's quarters and a cookhouse for the building contractors had been constructed, and a water supply for the village was in operation. Contracts were let for the construction of 12 houses for staff in December 1945. Construction began in early 1946 and was completed over the next two years. Water and drainage reticulation were completed in 1949.

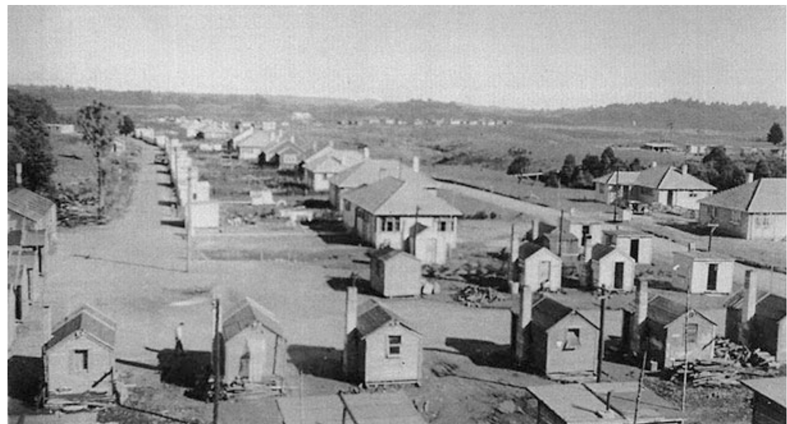

**Fig. 8.1** Pureora Village five years after establishment, showing the early single mens' huts, the new State houses for NZFS staff, and (in the distance) the mill workers' houses at the west end of the village nearest to the Odlin's and Ranginui mills. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (1950). Photographer: Buster Seager*

**Fig. 8.2** Pureora Village on a crisp winter day in about 1978. The flat-topped house on the right was typical of those occupied by mill workers' families. It was then occupied by the NZFS/DOC goat hunting team from 1978 to 1989. A similar house (the Blue House, across the road) was converted into a field base and accommodation for visiting researchers. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer: John Mason*

For the next 40 years the village settled into the landscape (Figs. 8.1, 8.2 and 8.5).

## Location and Isolation

Rusty Russell's father Magnus was one of the carpenters sent to finish building the Ranginui mill at Pureora in the winter of 1947. He recruited Rusty to help, picking him and Alec Reid up from Rotorua and driving to Pureora via Te Kuiti—"a three-hour trip if you didn't get stuck".

They arrived in the middle of the night, and fell into the only accommodation available, a group of single mens' huts with two beds squeezed into each of them. There was no hot water so "First job in the morning was to get the axe and break your way through the ice on the drum outside. So you can imagine there wasn't much washing done".

Even when the village was well established, there was no electric power supply from outside until 1956, but a diesel-driven generator started operating at 6 am and ran until 10 pm. If the generator cut out, say during a dance at the village hall, the chap on duty would have to run down to the shed and start it again. If it cut out again, it was usually because one or more of the houses was overloading. That meant isolating part of the village until the electrician could come, and it was usually not difficult to guess which part to cut out. Next day the electrician usually found that someone had been putting a heavy gauge wire into their main fuse.

The water supply came from an unlogged area behind the village. It was untreated, so the Health Department used to come regularly to check it. Sediment was minimized by keeping the logging well clear of the stream, but "the bug count", as OC Ivan Frost called it, "used to depend on how far up the creek the last dead deer was".

Village life was especially difficult for women unused to country life. Helen Russell remembered arriving in Pureora in 1953, a city girl from Rotorua who had never seen a mill or lived in a

**Fig. 8.3** A typical NZFS logging crew. *Left* to *right* Sonny Anderson, John Evans, Digger Tane, Joe Ngatai, Ben Kane, Laurie Flay, Bill Reti. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Date and photographer unknown*

logging village before. There was no store, no power at night, and a bus only three times a week, which arrived in Te Kuiti at 11 am and left at 2 pm. So you had to get all the shopping plus a haircut, or a tooth filled or a doctor's appointment within those times. The gravel roads were unkind to her high-heeled shoes, and she was homesick at first. Her children began to arrive after 1954, and all of them in due course attended the Pureora School. Most of the men had grown up close to the bush, and relished the camaraderie of the tight-knit working teams (Fig. 8.3).

## Telephones

The lack of telephones seriously accentuated the isolation. The 14 mile phone line from Benneydale to Pureora, an old earth circuit, was finished in 1947, and a tiny post and telegraph office opened on 15 December 1947. It was run by Ivy Grimshaw, daughter of the resident saw-doctor, Arthur Grimshaw (Fig. 7.10).

By May 1950 there were still only two manual phones available in the community at night for emergencies. Even in 1956 there were only three in offices—at the Forestry HQ, the Ranginui mill (manager Magnus Russell), and the Odlins mill (manager Roy Winwood). The only home that had a phone was that of the NZFS OC, and the office phone was switched over to it at night and at weekends. Ivan Frost remembered that he and Pauline would light their fire as late as possible on a Sunday morning, because as soon as the smoke appeared from the chimney, someone would be over to use the phone.

The summit of Pureora is the highest point north of the central volcanoes, and offered a tempting possibility for TV companies extending their coverage in the early 1960s. For a while there was a risk that they might build a huge mast there, and a road to construct and service it. Fortunately for the landscape values of the future PFP, they chose Te Aroha instead, but the outside world crept in eventually: in 1972 a microwave mast was built on Rangitoto, and a repeater in 1983. NZFS ensured that the large cleared construction area was restored by 1985.

## Roads and Buses

The central location and rugged surrounding landscape (Chap. 1) explain why Pureora Forest

**Fig. 8.4** Barryville mill and village in the late 1970s. The circular structure is a grade sorting table, and the conical wastewood burner stands next to the mill at *top left*. The single street of mill worker's houses was completely demolished after the mill closed in December 1978. SH 30 crosses the picture at the top (right to Benneydale, left to Mangakino). *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

Village was isolated for so long. When the two mills at Pureora were built in 1947, the only way in or out was the road from Te Kuiti, which virtually stopped at Benneydale. From there to Pureora village there was just a rough mud track. For the first few years, the 53 km to Te Kuiti felt like 100 km of dodging potholes among slushy pumice and gravel. The road still included a section of unsealed gravel in 1979, when Dawson visited Pureora in the course of his research [5].

The road between the village at Pureora and the nearest neighbouring village of Barryville (Fig. 8.4) was at first only a walking track of 4 km, until after 1956 when the Public Works Department used road metal (gravel) from the Pureora Quarry to form a vehicle track. The rock used tended to form sharp edges when crushed, which shredded tyres. It had to be covered with pumice, making it prone to potholes.

There were no links eastward to Lake Taupo across the ranges (Fig. 7.4). In March 1947, it took Lew Hahn three days to get from Pureora to Tihoi on foot, but he concluded that it would be possible to push a connecting road across the saddle between Pureora and Titiraupenga one day. The present Link Road was built in 1979.

The road to Mangakino was finally finished in 1955, again using crushed metal taken from the Pureora Quarry. Before the Whakamaru dam was built, the only way to cross the Waikato River was a Bailey bridge across a narrows where Maori used to jump across.

The NZR Road Services bus to Te Kuiti started running in 1950, carrying the older children to secondary school and the housewives to do their shopping. The bus driver occupied a house in the village, which enabled him to be based at Pureora rather than at Benneydale. By 1971 the improvements in the roads and the increasing number of private cars meant that the service was running at a loss, and it stopped on 6 July 1979 [19].

## Housing

The existence of new houses and the beginnings of a community were quite an attraction for potential workers: one of the earliest residents, Kitch Pedder, came to Pureora in 1947 only because he was offered a share of a state house.

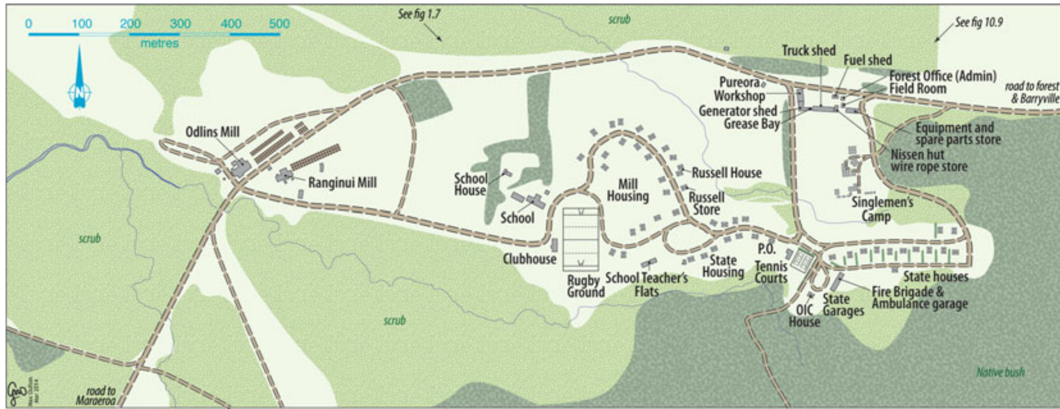


**Fig. 8.5** Map of Pureora village in 1953, during the heyday of the timber mills. *Drawn by Max Oulton from aerial photographs*

It had no open fire and the winters were cold, so they used to undo the stove front and pile the wood in, making the kitchen black with smoke.

The "flat-top" houses for the mill workers were built of prefabricated materials at the E&B factory in Hamilton, all to the same flat-roofed design regardless of destination, then trucked onto the site and bolted together. There were hundreds of them all over the country, all with malthoid roofs and painted in pastel colours. The 1947/48 Annual Report from the Te Kuiti office of NZFS recorded 22 sawmill scheme houses: Ranginui 5, Odlins 6, and Morningside 11.

By 1952 there were over 30 homes at Pureora, half established under the Timber Workers Housing Scheme (Fig. 8.5). All the houses had wood ranges with wetbacks, and radios. There were no fridges, since there was no power at night, no insulation despite the cool climate (Box 1.2), and only seven houses had vacuum cleaners [13]. But social life in the community was growing, and active sports clubs were developing.

The single mens' quarters comprised a row of individual huts (Fig. 8.1), plus an ablutions block. and a cookhouse run by Gertrude Grimshaw. In 1947 this redoubtable lady charged the bushmen £2 a week for meals. Years later, Peter Archer (Gertie's grandson-in-law) once met an old bushman who was there at the time, who still raved about Gertie's cooking. Regrettably, the consolations of the cookhouse did not prevent the single men from becoming notorious for damaging their huts and causing a nuisance to the adjoining married quarters.

The difference in size and quality between the gabled state houses allocated to forestry workers by NZFS and the flat-tops provided for timber workers by the mills was always a potential friction point that had to be carefully managed by the OC. Critical comments about this and related social issues [13] were the main reason why, when Kitch Pedder first arrived as OC in late 1953, he was specifically instructed by the DG of Forests to deal with it. All the same, most reports showed good relationships, allowing for a bit of over-indulgence by the single men from the mills on paydays and at weekends.

Inevitably, rough use and cold wet weather began to tell on the houses, particularly the flat-tops occupied by the timber workers. By 1962/63, several were in a poor state of repair because of leaking roofs. By the 1968/69 year only three old-style malthoid roofs remained in the village (one of them appears at the far right of Fig. 8.2).

The 1972/73 annual report stated that 14 timber workers' houses and 32 huts would soon have to be replaced unless hundreds of dollars was spent on each for weather proofing and replacing worn out plumbing, fittings and joinery units. By then only 8 of the original 18 sawmill houses were occupied, and one of these was by the local shopkeeper. The population was 55 men, 37 women, 99 children, total 191, and the school roll was 102.

The next year, the sole carpenter's time was "being dissipated on maintaining old drains, septic tanks, and replacing decayed material on some houses", because accommodation for both married and single men had continued to deteriorate. The following year, 1975, NZFS policy changed to allow workers to live in nearby urban areas, and travel from there to their jobs in the village.

## Collecting the Pay

Staff were paid every second Thursday, in cash. In Kitch Pedder's time the OC and pay clerk had to drive to the bank in Te Kuiti (53 km), which meant half a day lost for two men. "We kept a revolver in the little suitcase we carried the pay in", Pedder remembered. This was standard NZFS practice in the 1940s and 50s [6: 145], but not necessarily much of a comfort. "We often wondered what we would do if we were stopped—would we be able to get it out in time? Would we have actually used it?" [18].

Bill Drower tells a story about a real panic over the worker's pay which arose when an NZFS staffer was dispatched to Te Kuiti to collect stores, post mail and collect the pay bag from the bank. He did not realise until standing at the bank counter that he had accidentally posted the envelope containing the cheque for the bank along with the other mail. It took several frantic calls to the Postmaster, the Forest office, the bank and the Chief Postmaster in Hamilton before the mail box could be opened, the vital envelope retrieved and the business at the bank concluded. That staffer found a thousand reasons not to be sent on the same errand again.

When SH 30 eastwards was opened, the pay account was transferred to a branch of the BNZ bank in Mangakino (33 km). BNZ would send a secure truck to deliver cash to the bank every other week, and it would be open 10 am to 2 pm.

Dave Yanko (Fig. 8.7) enjoyed doing this job, because it gave him and the clerk the chance to drop into the pub for a few beers after picking up the suitcase. They took the suitcase full of money in with them, and tucked it down behind the foot rest in front of the bar. "One day we must have been there a couple of hours, we took off, and remembered halfway home that we didn't have the money. We ducked back to the pub and the suitcase was still there, and the relief was….well, we sobered up that quick" [18].

When the precious suitcase with its enormous quantity of cash arrived back at Pureora, the pay clerk and the driver would lock themselves in an office for a couple of hours and divide it all between the employees' pay envelopes. Then everyone would file into the office on Thursdays about 5 o'clock and pick up their pay.

Direct credit was practically unheard-of, and transferring cash into the post office savings bank was too much trouble, so all the local NZFS staff went out with their two weeks' wages in cash, and a lot of them would go straight to the nearest bar. They'd have some really good sessions on Friday and Saturday, and then the money would start to run out during the week. The weekends between paydays were never as good as the weekends after a payday.

The worst problems with management of money and time came up over Christmas, as described in detail by John Mason. From Christmas to New Year, NZFS (like most Government Departments) shut down. Then, everyone had to take their two weeks' annual leave before the mills started up again in mid January. That neatly solved any problems over leave for the rest of the year—there wasn't any. But in December NZFS paid two pay days at once, so people went away for their holidays with a month's pay in their pockets, and two weeks later they were broke even though there was still two weeks to go before the next pay day.

That created a lot of social problems, until OC John Gaukrodger brought in an unofficial system by which people were given only three weeks' pay before they went off for their four weeks off, and then when they got back he gave them the fourth week's pay in arrears so that they had something to live on before the next regular pay. The same problems plagued the mill workers, but the mill managers never changed their system.

## Workshop

The need for constant maintenance of ageing machinery meant that the workshop was an absolutely central part of the NZFS project, and retaining good staff was a perpetual headache for OCs. The isolation of the village meant that it was always difficult to recruit and keep enough skilled mechanics to maintain the fleet. A-grade mechanics were worth their weight in gold, but living at a remote place like Pureora required a special type of family, especially when the children got to high school age. Those who stayed did so mainly out of family or tribal loyalty.

In 1953 there were two 8-year old Caterpillar bulldozers and two Mack trucks on the books, plus the gang buses and the OC's car. Within two years, chassis cracks made one Mack unroadworthy and the other marginal. Jack Fyffe, logging officer of the time, was always bitter about the way the bush crews were starved of equipment. He was supposed to have access to four tractors, but "you were lucky if you ever had two going at once".

Jack was especially annoyed when orders for two new tractors were approved, and they were given to another forestry operation. By the time Ivan Frost arrived in 1957, there were supposedly two trucks and three dozers available, but only one truck and no dozers were operational, and staff morale was low.

Equipment breakdowns often figured large in the annual reports compiled by successive OCs, but no action was taken even in 1960/61 when worn-out equipment caused a loss in production. Ivan Frost's dismal conclusion was that this was "A black year for breakdowns, it seems we will have to grind to a halt before anything will be done. We have had no new equipment since 1956". The next year, a new logging truck arrived.

The workshop was not a comfortable place to work, especially in winter. That all changed in 1968/69 when, to general astonishment, underfloor electric heating was installed in the workshop. It meant that a mechanic would no longer have to leave his work to thaw out his hands around the stove, his tools would not be icy to the touch, and even his overalls would be warm to put on if left on the floor overnight. Bill Drower reported that time-and-motion studies of several of the longer repair jobs recorded a 20 % improvement in output—sufficient to justify the installation of underfloor heating.

One of the biggest problems was getting spare parts. All major stores and parts had to come by rail from Auckland, but were often put on the train before the advice note had arrived, so the Pureora staff had no idea when to expect the goods. Neither did NZR staff consider it part of their job to tell customers that their stuff had arrived, so it might lie at the Mangapehi rail yard for days before anyone went to look for it. Over the years, commented Ivan Frost through gritted teeth, these high costs and delays in obtaining parts must have added thousands of pounds on to the costs of their operations, or would mean having to assemble a new machine out of bits of broken ones.

In 1956 the workshop store was run by Buster Seager. The main items he dealt with were tractor parts and track gear, because the pumice roads were very hard on tractors.

Relationships between the mills were usually friendly, and included various forms of mutual help, but soured quickly if damage was not immediately made good. The Pureora station diary for September 1951 records that "Ranginui broke one of our 6′6″ fishtail saws. [NZFS] refuses to loan another".

## NZFS Officers in Charge

Over the 40 years (1947–87) that Pureora village was run by NZFS as a planned forestry operation, it had eleven permanent or acting OCs, as follows: Lew Hahn 1948; Eric Johnstone 1948–53; Keith (Kitch) Pedder 1953–57; Ivan Frost 1957–62; W. H. Robinson/Athol Ferguson (Acting) 1962–64; Bill Drower 1964–69; Darbie Perston 1969–1974; Jack Walker 1974–80; Dave Yanko (Acting) 1980–81; John Gaukrodger 1981–87.

The life of the OC in a small and isolated forestry community required the expertise, not only of a qualified forester, but also the wisdom

and keen perception of a sociologist. When Ivan Frost arrived as OC he already knew what he was coming to, as he had first worked there as a young Leading Hand on timber cruising in 1947. Nevertheless, he recognised that he'd have been a better OC if he'd had some sort of social training.

Technical problems, he said, were simple, because you could either solve them or you couldn't, but social problems were never ending. The people he had to deal with were not only employees, but also the guys he drank with. He was gregarious and had to socialise, and was on the committees of all six local clubs, but although the community included some people he would like to invite to his house, there were others he wouldn't, and he had to be the same to everyone. Outsiders don't realise that managing such issues required skills you were never taught, he said, so you just took it out on your wife when you got home.

For example, one episode reported in May 1951 arose when the OC Eric Johnstone refused to provide a mill worker with a Forest Service vehicle, since he could have used one belonging to the Odlins mill where he worked. The Timber Workers Union became involved in the subsequent stoush, and Eric was exonerated. The station diary dryly comments that the episode illustrated the general attitude of the community, who tended to see Forest Service equipment as public property. Two years later, another comment noted that "Community relations difficult but with slight improvement. Mill companies not helping".

An even more illuminating example of the troubles of an OC was revealed when Margaret Smith, a student from Wellington, undertook a social study of life in Pureora village [13]. Her analysis was based on interviews with 35 families, mainly the wives. She observed a worrying distinction between the state and mill employees, which arose in part because NZFS looked after their own people better than the mill owners looked after theirs. Most of the state houses at one end of the village were in good repair, but virtually all the mill houses at the other end needed maintenance and painting. The topsoil had been replaced around the state houses, but not round the mill houses, so gardening was mainly confined to state house families.

Some families in Pureora village kept poultry, until wild NZ falcons discovered in the 1950s that domesticated birds were easy game [3]. Falcons were of course also protected, but in pioneering days, pragmatic considerations tended to dominate. The falcons were largely exterminated by village residents, although they have since made a remarkable recovery.

The mill workers drew £20–35 (NZ$40–70) per fortnight, before deductions for rent of 15 shillings to 17/6 per week (NZ$1.50–1.76), and 3 shillings for the single mens' huts. The men also often asked for advances in wages, which drastically limited the contents of the next pay packet. Odlin's average total wage cheque was £380 (NZ $760), of which only £193 (NZ$386) might be issued as take-home pay, after much of it was retained for rent, tax and wages paid in advance, mainly to finance the mill workers' heavy drinking. A married bushman entitled to £25/6/6 per fortnight lost deductions of £10/4/–; a single man earning £22/19/7 paid deductions of £6/17/10.

The mill managers justified the situation by saying that unless wage advances were allowed, the employees would not remain. But the system meant that four out of five mill workers were living hand to mouth, including those with several children. State employees were better off because no such system applied to them.

In December 1953 the new OC Kitch Pedder was called to a special meeting in Wellington with the DG of Forests Alex Entrican and other senior staff including W.J. Kinlock, stimulated by the implications of Smith's thesis. The meeting was to discuss the future of Pureora village, and how Forestry authorities could meet the challenges identified by Smith's work. Whilst recognizing that Smith's was a special study for a special purpose, which did not include forest management, nevertheless NZFS accepted that they had a special responsibility to develop a good community spirit at Pureora.

Pedder was told that the OC's job did not start and end with supervising log deliveries according to schedule, but it involved, among other things, ensuring local leadership and inspiration from Forestry staff, breaking down the class distinction between the forestry and mill workers, looking

after the mill houses to exactly the same level as other buildings, ensuring tidy lawns and frontages in the village, encouraging churches and other outside interests, and helping to establish a local committee capable of showing interest and ability to manage the proposed new community hall. “Forestry authorities are liberal with providing recreation room and camp amenities”, said Kinlock, “and intend to remain so, but evidence of some appreciation from villagers was required”.

Pedder was instructed to make early contact with the mill managers, get them to clean up the disgraceful appearance of the mills and their surroundings, and to cease giving sawmillers advances on their wages, which was spent only on beer. NZFS instructions (preserved in a file note in DOC archives) end by pointing out that “how Pedder was to carry out his onerous tasks in the village was up to him, but he could be assured of every help and understanding from HO. Signed W.J. Kinlock 9/12/53”. Most of these problems were already known to successive OCs, but they had been identified in startling detail by Smith’s analysis of village life.

Far from resenting such a burden, Pedder agreed that providing for the social needs of the village was a very important part of the job, and attributed the idea of the canteen business and the Football Club bar to that meeting.

It was not easy, and sometimes the social distinction between the OC and the rest had consequences for his family. Pedder’s wife Nellie taught at the Pureora School, and one day their small son Ron came home covered in bruises. Mr. Patrick the headmaster asked Nellie if she knew whether Kitch had recently had to discipline anyone? The answer was that yes, he had recently had to sack a man, and it was that man’s son who had knocked Ron about.

Pedder was no doubt pretty annoyed, but he had to try to remember that sawmillers were always under tremendous pressure to produce the required quantities of timber, and the mill managers were not always willing to make allowances for isolated working conditions.

One of Ivan Frost’s proudest moments came in 1962, after he had left Pureora. He was asked to return, in company with logging officer Athol Ferguson, to choose and help fell a perfect totara tree for a very special purpose. It had to be straight and long enough to provide a 52-foot log to be carved by Inia Te Wiata into a pouihi (“totem pole”) for New Zealand House, then being built for the new NZ High Commission in the Haymarket, London.

They found three possible trees by lunchtime and organized a logging crew to fell the best one, but to put it down on flat ground without breaking it meant cutting against the direction the tree was leaning, and all the scarfing and wedges they had available would not move it. By 5 pm they were sitting down considering their next move when, very slowly, the tree began to fall. It went down within inches of the prepared site and landed without the slightest crack (totara trees often shattered when they hit the ground).

Inia spent seven years carving it, in a workshop in the basement carpark (Fig. 8.6), and it was finally erected in 1972, a year after he died

**Fig. 8.6** Inia te Wiata carving the pouihi for NZ House, London, from a totara felled in Pureora Forest. *Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. ATL 1/2-190156 F*

[15]. Years later (in 1989), Ivan visited London and proudly photographed "our" tree and the spectacular carving work on it.

The heyday of native timber milling passed with the 1950s, and after that the progressive closing of exhausted mills (Chap. 7) inevitably led to a gradual reduction in the number of mill workers living at Pureora, and an associated decline in the school roll. The OC in the 1970s, Jack Walker, saw his job in the village as being a combination of mayor and father confessor, a hard ask during the height of the anti-logging controversy that took them all by surprise in 1977–78. He occasionally also had to act as tour guide for important overseas visitors. The station diary for May 3 1974 notes that "A Mr. Suharto from Indonesia came to see Pureora logging".

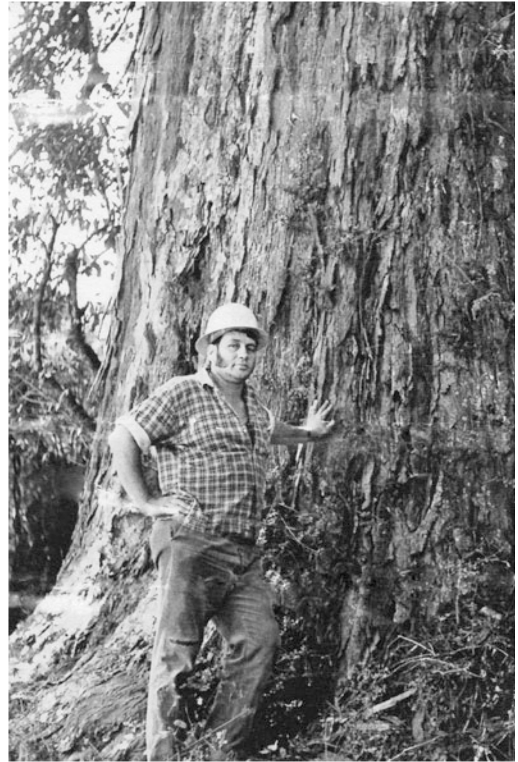

**Fig. 8.7** Dave Yanko, active Pureora resident, long-serving logging officer and acting OC in 1980–81. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

## Staff

In 1957, the Forestry staff numbered 12 handling logs in the bush, 12 growing exotic seedlings in the nursery and planting them out, two in the office, three mechanics if available, one or two on roading, one in the rope store splicing strops and sharpening saws, and a storeman. Plus a camp cook and his off-sider, and a camp sergeant to keep the place tidy.

The OC had to coordinate all these different tasks and specialities, helped by senior staff including a logging officer, a planting officer, and various technical advisers. It wasn't always easy, yet Ivan Frost remembered Pureora as a good community with few hassles or frictions among men who worked, drank and played sport together regardless of rank. He reckoned that the occasional disciplinary action required of the OC usually caused more trouble among the wives than among their men.

Typical of the long-serving Forestry families of the village were Dave Yanko (Fig. 8.7) and his wife Mauven. They lived at Pureora for 30 years, until he was transferred to Tairua Forest, Whangamata, in November 1984. Dave had been in charge of all bush operations until the moratorium, and then he took responsibility for roading. Both were fully involved with the community; all but the eldest of their four children were born there, and all attended the school; Mauven was on the committees of the CWI and the school for years, and later worked in the school office; Dave was a stalwart of the Bush United rugby club both as player and secretary; and both were involved in Christmas parties, fire brigade competitions, rugby socials, the lot.

The place and its back-of beyond reputation were well known to the senior staff, and they understood the way that isolation tended to accentuate the problems of recruiting and retaining skilled labour. The official employee statistics for the 1952/53 year quoted by Smith [13] showed a 70 % turnover in 12 months, with a net loss of 16 working men.

Staff made great efforts to improve social life in the village, but almost a decade after Smith's

survey the 1960/61 annual report was still complaining about the shortage of skilled labour, by then due to a different problem: a commercial company, NZ Forest Products, was offering better wages that were enticing men away. Fortunately, someone higher up took action. The next year, a new bonus scheme improved production, and an increase in mechanics' wages meant that the workshop could, for a time, hold a full crew.

Some of the labour shortages of the postwar years were met by British assisted immigrants. They found 1950s New Zealand in general, and Pureora in particular, very different from anything they had previously experienced. When Kitch Pedder got a call from Wellington, saying that a group was coming up on the overnight train, arriving at Mangapehi in the small hours of the morning, he got huts ready, laid down mattresses, and drove down to meet them. By daylight, one had disappeared already; by contrast, one (Gordon Gillespie), who couldn't get over the OC himself going to pick up his new men, stayed for years.

Probably around half the village community were Maori, and the stalwarts among them were invaluable people to have in the village. Some families, like the Pihamas, could stabilize the whole group. Frost could sometimes help combat the lure of better money elsewhere by some under-the-table deals.

Such payments were illegal of course, but necessary to keep key staff like ace dozer driver Scotty Pihama. Scotty could drive one of those big bulldozers "like a sewing machine", as Ivan Frost put it. The downtime of his machine was half that of all others, because he knew it so well and was quick to spot anything wrong.

Like many men working around noisy machines without any ear protection, as was usual then, Scotty became hard of hearing, but would never admit it, so he had to second-guess what the OC was saying. He was still a key member of any logging crew, and if he could not solve a mechanical problem, nobody could.

In general, the Maori of those days led very hard lives, observed OC Ivan Frost; they were tough as old boots, and got into some horrendous fights, but they were gentlemen. They never used weapons, and always turned up for work on Monday regardless, yet once they got to the end of their working life they were likely to lose their homes, and never had any money to buy one of their own. Life expectancy was shorter for Maori than for Pakeha, and there were a lot of tangi (funerals), all of which were attended by the OC.

Mauven Yanko had a story about one of her neighbours, Bev Rudsit, who had a real struggle living at Pureora—with five kids and a wood stove, cutting her own slab firewood to fit the firebox to keep the hot water and the food coming—she said they were the happiest years of her life, because she was surrounded by good neighbours, almost all Maori.

Bill Drower, OC in the mid to late 1960s, was in charge of village residents working in a variety of jobs (including 12 forestry staff of all grades plus mill workers employed by two different companies plus teachers, store keepers, and a bus driver). Drower saw the result as providing sufficient diversity among the locals for energetic, resourceful and helpful community, and the few exceptions as making no difference.

At the other extreme of social judgement, Jack Fyffe, in charge of logging crews, and Jack Walker, a later OC, attributed part of the reason for the eventual demise of NZFS to the policy of the Department of Social Welfare to bring unemployed people to work in the forest, whether they were capable of doing the job or not.

Fyffe (born 1913, and a life-long bushman right down to his boots) was equally scathing about "all those BSc jokers…they were a law unto themselves" whose crackpot ideas wasted money that should have been shown as a profit. It says a lot about the Pureora community that, even with so many different private opinions, the village was usually described as a friendly place.

All the small communities round about had a hall, and on Saturday night there was always a do somewhere. Rusty Russell would go round the village saying "I'm leaving for…." And if you wanted to go you just hopped on his truck and away he'd go. At 2 or 3 or 4 in the morning you'd all hop on the back of the truck and come home. They were a lot of fun, those days remembered Dave Yanko.

By the mid 1970s, the village housing and amenities were showing their age, and the depletion of the forests was causing anxiety about job security. Firm decisions about the future of the village were obviously needed, but the top brass at NZFS Head Office were caught up in national-scale political arguments about West Coast logging proposals, which had begun to affect decisions on the central North Island forests too (Chap. 6). The 1973–74 Annual Report commented that the last few years had been a very unsettled period for Pureora, and morale amongst the residents had been declining steadily.

In response, NZFS began positive moves towards re-establishing Pureora village on a permanent basis, by letting a contract for three new houses and a new recreation room, and starting a programme of re-roofing some houses. In the short term, these, and the recent improvements to the new school and teachers' flats, were "…. helping to allay flagging morale amongst residents", said the OC. In the longer term, these improvements only made the residents more determined to resist the final blow that was to change all their lives only four years hence.

Some of the longest-serving key staff who contributed their memories to the oral history programme were able to supply a succinct summary of life in the village, mainly positive and fascinatingly different from those of the OCs. In Dave Yanko's words, "She was an excellent life, let's do it all again".

## Pureora Forest School

The Education Board were planning to build a school in 1945 at E&B's mill at Maraeroa, but Lew Hahn suggested Pureora would be a more central site to place a school to serve the number of children expected to be living in the area within a few years. Pureora residents missed out on a school at the time, but in 1947 they tried again.

The school at Maraeroa, by now rather ramshackle, was to be enlarged, perhaps because the school committee was made up of mostly Maraeroa residents. Pureora residents opposed the plan, and this time they won. During the Easter break in 1948 the school was moved to Pureora, by a team including Geoff Hammond, Roy Callaghan, Henry Simpson and Bruce Archer (son-in-law of Arthur Grimshaw), for a contract fee of £250 (NZ$500) [2: 175]. Two D8s and other Forest Service equipment were used to widen the road in places, and some damage was done. The station diary comments that "The exercise was officially investigated", and one of the guys involved lost a salary grade because of it.

The village community continued to grow as more houses were completed, and by 1951 the Education Department was putting up extra rooms as the post-war baby boom and the height of local logging operations helped to boost the school roll to 155 pupils in 1952/53 [19]. The children of all the local sawmill communities (Pureora, Barryville and Maraeroa) went to the Pureora Forest School (Fig. 8.8). A bus carried the 45 primary school children and 9 preschoolers from Barryville to Pureora (4 km) and back every day.

One of the first questions asked by prospective employees in the mid 1960s, reported OC Bill Drower, was "What is the schooling like?" The answer was that the teaching was excellent. Helen Russell remembered a long line of dedicated staff —Jack Green, Alan Ingram, Rod Nielsen, Bill Murray, Vic O'Rourke, George Keown—who all did not only a great job with the kids but also gave a lot to the village social life.

Bill Murray was a Maori teacher who understood his own people and knew how to work with them, remembered Mauven Yanko, then a teacher's aide. If Maori kids tried to skip school he would ask the others where they were, and if he was told "Oh, they have to babysit 'cos their Mum's sick", he would not settle for that. He'd stalk up the road, break up the card game and tell them, "Here, you, look after your kids, and you, back to school". Only he could have done that. At one stage, Bill had 46 kids in his classroom.

Unfortunately, the school buildings did not match the teaching. A new member of the School Committee, Lew Read, teamed up with Bill, and with the support of the rest of Committee prepared a comprehensive proposal to the Hamilton

**Fig. 8.8** Pureora Village School, across the road from the football field. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai* (*1986 or 1989*). *Photographer: John Mason*

Education Board requesting an upgrade in building. Plans to build a new, relocatable 4-room school began in 1968, including insulation and heating better than the norm for a rural school, and it was ready by February 1970.

In 1972, the school roll was 102, and for the next eight years the school was graded for four staff, with rolls of 104 in 1976, 107 in 1977, 114 in 1978 and 115 in 1979 [9]. It was still very difficult to find staff, especially as two houses were no longer available for teachers.

## The Post Office and General Store

The first post and telegraph office opened on 15 December 1947, but for many years there was no other shop of any kind. Smith's survey of the inadequate facilities in the village up to 1953 specifically recommended the establishment of a general store, to give the women living in different areas of the village a common meeting ground.

Another of Smith's recommendations was that NZFS should establish a canteen. The first meeting of various staff interested in helping to make this happen was called by Kitch Pedder in 1954, fresh from his meeting in Wellington. It elected a Committee, including Colin Sutherland, Harry Bunn, Kitch Pedder, W.C. Johnstone (the NZFS clerk), and Ken Seymour to organize it.

The idea was to encourage a social hub for the village, run by volunteers after hours, and its stated intention was to generate proceeds to be spent on assisting the organisation of the community. Within a year it was in operation, in a little shed at the back of one of the houses. Stock was bought wholesale from Bond and Bond, who allowed a month to sell it. Harry Bunn described the canteen in great detail.

> We each put in a fiver as a capital base. We bought high turnover, high profit lines like chocolate and cigarettes, and we sold those in a week, spent it again, then spent it again, before we had to pay the bill. I was treasurer and I remember being quite startled that the first bill was £300 or so but I was able to pay it! We set up in a spare garage and put in shelves. It became the focal point of the village. We decided to have ice cream for the kids, and we bought a 15 gallon fridge. …we could sell 15 gallons in 4 days. Eventually we bought another 15 gallon unit. The suppliers were astounded at how much ice cream we sold…and supplied us with a 50 gallon unit. They showed us how to roll a hollow ice cream to double the profit. We found there was an enormous profit on it anyway so we piled it on and made enormous ice creams – we became famous for the size of our ice creams and

people came from all over the place! And we had soft drinks of course, and they delivered them and picked up empties …the kids would bring in half a dozen bottles and immediately spend the deposit on other high-profit items. It flourished, so much so that people said, hey there is enough [custom] to run a shop. …We made so much money …we completely refurbished the hall, £400 worth, we supported the fire brigade, all the sports clubs, they all got handouts. The profit that first year was way above what any of us were earning, even Kitch. It ended when we all got transfers [18].

Within a couple of years NZFS sold the canteen at cost to Mrs. Ruby Alexander, wife of a fireman at Odlin's mill, and she ran it as a shop with basic supplies from 1956. Helen Russell used to help her in the shop, and stood in for her when she wanted to have a day in her beautiful garden. In 1964, Ruby's husband died suddenly, and a year later she decided to move on.

Helen and Rusty Russell took it over in 1965, moved it to a new building and developed it into the Pureora General Store under the IGA franchise (Fig. 8.9)—just another responsibility to add to Rusty's cartage business and their new baby. They catered for everything, from ice cream and cigarettes to working boots, swannies (bush shirts) and ploughs. Watties and Lever Bros would rail orders of ten cartons or more of tinned food for free to Mangapehi, and Rusty would pick them up at the station.

Helen got to know all the local children sent down to the shop by their parents with a fistful of money to pay off their bills, and heard a lot of stories from them. A potbelly stove in the store made it a warm social centre in winter—anyone who was there, eating a pie or warming their gumboots, would stoke the fire or go get wood for it, and Helen could even get the kids to nip outside and bring in her washing for her while she was busy doing orders.

Most clients were honest, as indeed one needs to be in a small community where everyone knows everyone else's business. Once a couple of brazen lads pinched some swannies, and wore their new gear to work next morning, "still with the creases in" said Helen, still surprised years later. Jack Walker sorted them out, she added. He made them pay for them or bring them back. It is not clear whether her conclusion that there were "No hard feelings" refers to the lads or to herself, but Jack's attitude seemed to ensure it wouldn't happen again.

Burglaries were rare, and usually due to outsiders; Helen mentioned two. Once, "they just backed their tow ball in through the window; [next morning] the glass had gone out and so had a lot of other things".

A much more serious burglary happened when Rusty was away. Helen went down one morning with the cash box under her arm and found the front door open, the padlock on the

**Fig. 8.9** Pureora General Store, and the Russells' house. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer: John Mason*

ground, the freezers open and the shop a total shambles. The burglars had taken all the school t-shirts, soft drinks and sweets, torch batteries and three axe handles ("those would have been the first things they'd have hit you with", said the police when they came to investigate). The same night, NZFS lost all their chain saws. Eventually the police tracked down a suspect to Te Awamutu, and in Court a local woman recognized him as someone who had been in the village that day. The Russells ran the revamped shop until GST came in in 1987.

The long awaited fully fledged Pureora Forest Post Office opened in what had formerly been the visiting doctor's room, by the parking bay in the middle of the village, in July 1972. The Post Office and the Store were vital links to the outside world for the villagers. Between them they offered not only a mail service but also a bank and a communal meeting place, an asset to the community with a local significance out of all proportion to its size. They provided credit from payday to payday, and the only petrol pump for 13 miles (22 km).

## The Volunteer Fire Brigade

Hot machinery combined with flammable fuel and accidental sparks (not to mention lightning strikes) always makes fires a perpetual hazard in forestry and timber operations, and a big fire could cause massive economic damage. The Forest Journal kept by forestry staff at Te Kuiti also commented on two other hazards common in the early days: many fires were started by sparks from log-hauling steam engines, or by pig hunters [12].

Between December 1945 and March 1946, a period of unprecedented fire hazard, 62 fires burnt over 16,330 acres of State Forest land, including 390 acres (157.6 ha) at Pureora. The scorched timber sustained damage amounting to 25,000 bd ft/acre (146 $m^3$ per ha).

In response, a Fire Emergency Army radio truck was stationed at Pureora, a fire hazard monitoring station established and, because there was then no telephone, a radio-telephone was installed to link Pureora with the Te Kuiti office.

The Pureora Fire Brigade could be called either an industrial unit under the Forest Service, or a volunteer unit under the Fire Service. Which label was used depended on who was asking, since at that time only the Fire Service had a country-wide liquor licence. The Pureora Brigade was a Volunteer unit.

The Pureora Volunteer Fire Brigade was formed in 1951, financed by grants from NZFS, but it was also needed at the mills. Timber mills burned down with depressing frequency. It was the 1938 fire that destroyed the Mapara Timber Co.'s mill at Poro-o-tarao, and the 1939 fire at the Marton Sash and Door (MS&D)'s mill at Waione, that enabled the MS&D company to take over Mapara's cutting rights and expand their operation to Barryville (Chap. 5). MS&D also lost two other mills within a few months in 1940 (National Park and Erua) [20].

Mills near the Main Trunk Railway were especially vulnerable to fires started by sparks from steam engines. The Waione and National Park fires both began soon after an express train went by in the small hours of the morning, reports Wilson [20]. The National Park mill was burnt down twice more, and E&B lost and rebuilt their No. 1 mill at Mangapehi in 1945 and the smaller No. 2 mill in 1947 [2: 107–110].

At Pureora the Odlin's mill was burnt down in the middle of the night in 1957. Rusty Russell was the first to see the flames leaping up from it —he had had a bout of hepatitis so was not doing much drinking in the evenings. There was no siren, so he drove round the village with his hand on the horn to wake up the volunteer fire brigade. After the mill was rebuilt, Rusty kept his job until 1966, when he finished working for Odlin's and sold his logging truck.

On 15 October 1968 the Morningside mill at Barryville burned down, and was rebuilt by Christmas. Another fire which started on 10 February 1970 in the Ranginui timber stacks, and crossed the road to damage the Odlins sawdust and slab piles, was attributed by Forestry staff to the accumulated result of years of bad

housekeeping at the Ranginui mill. Minor chimney and kitchen fires in the village were common.

The Pureora Volunteer Fire Brigade members worked hard at their practice drills, and entered into the competitions between local brigades organized by the national Fire Service. They always did well, and won trophies several times. The Volunteer Brigade club house had a bar which was opened on Wednesday nights after practice, plus Thursdays and Fridays, supposedly open to members only. The regular members included many of the mechanics from the workshop, in part because the Chief Fire Officer was the mechanical overseer, Bruce Tricklebank.

At first the volunteer brigade was, of course, staffed entirely by men, but after the NZ Fire Service changed its rules in 1979 to permit women to train as fire-fighters, three women from Pureora joined up at once. Who else, they asked, could tackle fires in the village when the men were all out in the forest? The longest-serving members were Mrs. Belle Packer, Mrs. Eileen Ihaia, and Mrs. Sharon Tricklebank, whose husbands were also in the brigade. They were joined a couple of years later by Mrs. Bella Heta and Mrs. Patricia Hall. All five received long-service awards in 1982.

The women trained every Wednesday night, along with 12 male colleagues. Practical fire-fighting exercises were available on old forestry buildings, although normally their duties were limited to smaller fires in hedges and chimneys. The Chief Fire Officer was glad to know that if some of his men were too deep in the forest to get back in time, their wives would always be at the ready.

The Volunteer Fire Brigade worked only in the villages and at the mills. Fire control in the forest was the responsibility of the NZFS silviculture and production forestry teams, and was often very difficult. Early firefighters in remote areas had to carry water in 4-gallon back-packs, remembered Ivan Frost. The portable Paramount pump was a big advance—it could be set up at a convenient stream, and would pump water through a one-inch pipe for at least a mile. The only problems were that, at 85 pounds, it was heavy to carry into the bush [6: 85], and the Canadian centrifugal motor often refused to start, which must have been desperately frustrating for the firefighters.

By the 1970s fire-fighting equipment was more sophisticated and also more necessary, since burning was becoming the standard method of clearing logged areas at Pureora, but was still a hazardous operation. The accumulation of nearly 25 years of cutover slash that had been root-raked and planted provided plenty of fuel right next to highly flammable standing non-merchantable trees. The 1973/74 Annual Report from the Pureora OC describes an occasion when a helicopter was called into douse a fire, but was late arriving. The pilot had seen a fire, found a pond, and deposited a load on the blaze, but got rude gestures from the men on the ground. He eventually realised he was putting out the wrong fire [19].

The Volunteer Fire Brigade fulfilled a social need as well as providing a local fire fighting force, so the arguments for keeping it were more than merely economic, the OC told a NZFS review commissioned in 1974/75. It survived, but not for long. After 1981 the village began to empty, and some of the most dilapidated vacant houses were burned down for fire brigade practice.

## Prohibition

When Ngati Maniapoto first agreed to allow the opening of Te Rohe Potae for railway surveys in 1882 (Chap. 5), it was on condition that the Government agreed to declare the King Country "dry". As historian Michael King put it: "If the presence of the Pakeha was allowed, then there had to be some protection from his vices" [7: 253]. Perhaps this explains why Maori offences related to alcohol in the King Country at that time (1935–44) were so low (0.745 per 1000 people, compared with 1.345 per 1000 in the Waikato, and 3.743 in Gisborne).

Ngati Maniapoto were in a strong position to negotiate, since they knew how much the Government wanted to push through the Main Trunk Line. They had largely distanced themselves

from the Waikato tribes who, still smarting from post-war land confiscations, were less inclined to be co-operative. However, an official review of the "solemn pact" made between the Government and the chiefs of the King Country came to the conclusion that there was no bargain agreed for a proclamation of prohibition in return for concessions on the railway.

The main driver of the proclamation was a petition signed by 1400 Maori from Te Rohe Potae district, proving that prohibition had the almost unanimous assent of the local people. Moreover, at the time the petition was circulating (September 1884), the decision to use the King Country route for the railway, made on 24 October 1884, was still another month away [10].

Temperance organisations fought hard to bring about and maintain the prohibition order, as might have been expected. The Gospel Temperance Mission strongly influenced the Ngati Maniapoto chief Wahanui, who travelled to Wellington in November 1884 to plead the case. The proclamation was duly made on 3 December, under section 25 of the Licensing Act 1881. The Government agreed with Wahanui on humanitarian grounds (the desire to save the people from a proven evil), so he won his point with no reference to the railway, but perhaps neither party fully realised the potential of railway communications for undermining the decision in future years.

> There can be little doubt that the Maoris intended to keep intoxicating liquor entirely out of their territory. Unfortunately, it was permitted to follow up the workers constructing the railway, and when the railways began to run, liquor was transported upon them, and Europeans have been permitted to import intoxicating liquor ostensibly for their own consumption. …. but …despite illegal and discreditable trading by Europeans, the Maoris have been very considerably protected by the prohibition of the legalized sale of intoxicating liquor in the King Country [11: 200].

Many ingenious ways were found to get round the alcohol ban. Goods sheds at stations within the dry area were said to handle more consignments of sly grog than any other rail stations between Auckland and Palmerston North; one horse collar made frequent trips from Taumarunui to Auckland for repairs, until police found inside it a copper inner tube, which came back full of whisky [4: 118].

Another story concerns a magistrate who often travelled to Te Kuiti on the train, arriving as usual the night before he was to hold court. On one occasion he came to hear one of the more important of the ever-increasing number of local sly grog cases. It was the custom for the arrival of the magistrate to be celebrated with a little private but convivial party with his fellow solicitors, although this one was rather better supplied than usual. Next morning he arrived at court with a somewhat sore head, and the accused sly-grogger duly stood before him. The case had to be dropped after a solicitor informed His Honour that, "Sorry, sir, that was Exhibit A that we drank last night" [4: 116]. The small country courthouse in which this memorable event was recorded still stands behind its kauri front pillars in Queen St, Te Kuiti (Fig. 8.10), and is still regularly used for its designated purpose.

Europeans going to live in the King Country knew before they went there that it was a dry area.

> It is therefore to their dishonour that, after having settled there, a section of Europeans has consistently endeavoured to secure the repudiation of the terms of the Covenant with the Maoris….In 1926, an exceptionally vigorous effort was made to secure a poll in the King Country on the question of whether license was to be admitted. A petition from Europeans in this sense was signed by some 5000 people. A petition signed by some Maoris was also got up, asking for a referendum of all the Maori people as to whether license should be granted or not. Sworn declarations were made by a number saying that they had refused to sign, but their names were nevertheless found on the petition. On the other side, thirty-five leading chiefs in the King Country issued an Ohaki, or solemn testamentary declaration, reminding the people of the original Covenant, warning them of the evil that strong drink does, and urging them to remain in the path marked out by their forefathers [11: 200–202].

Country clubs operating on the locker system (locker owners were supposed to declare that they were white, over 21 and held liquor locked up and solely for their own use) made sociable drinking legal long before the 1946 Royal Commission recommended the lifting of the ban on alcohol sales if 60 % of the population voted for it.

**Fig. 8.10** Te Kuiti courthouse, scene of many sly-grogging cases during the era of prohibition in the King Country, and still a functioning Magistrate's Court today. *C.M. King* (*2013*)

At a referendum in March 1949 a strong Maori "No" vote kept the result below the 60 % threshold. But later in 1949 legislation was passed to allow licences to charter clubs, and after 1954, to pubs. By August 1954 the Football Club in Pureora village was operating a licence under restricted hours.

The first pub at Benneydale opened in December 1955. Rusty Russell was determined to be first in when the doors opened, so he and his mate (Boy Nathan) unloaded 4000 feet of timber in half an hour and got to the pub with two minutes to spare.

They found Paddy Hallen, a big coalminer from Benneydale, stretched across the door with his arms folded. Rusty accepted he could not be first in, but he was determined to be last out. There were speeches and celebrations all day, including at least one declaring that the Maori people would fight on for ever against liquor in the King Country (according to the *Otorohanga Times*, reporting the opening). Others were apparently willing to accept the new regime, since the paper also reported that 392 gallons of beer were consumed that day. Finally Rusty and Boy, no doubt among others, were thrown out by the local constable.

## The Football Club

When Pureora village was first established in 1945–46, flat areas were cleared not only for houses, a school, and roads, but also, right from the start, for a football field (Figs. 8.5 and 8.11). The field was bulldozed and graded in their own time by machinery operators Bruce Archer, Don Howe, Sonny Hughes and Hoppy Benbrook. It had a natural embankment, but was rather narrow outside the sidelines. The first local team started playing in 1948, and a year later they took a seven-a-side team to a competition in Benneydale and were the runners-up. Bill Watene was one of the more successful coaches during the 1980s.

A junior rugby team was entered in the Maniapoto competition in 1955–56 under coach Jack Fyffe. Other early coaches were Mike Mason in 1959, and Allan Ingram, headmaster of the school and a former Hawkes Bay All-Blacks triallist, in 1960.

The significance of rugby to Pureora social life was illustrated by a frank comment by former OC Bill Drower, that the two questions always asked of prospective employees were, do you

**Fig. 8.11** The Bush United Football Club in action at Benneydale. The clubhouse was built at Pureora in 1960, and was moved to Benneydale after the Pureora club closed in 1987. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

play rugby? And if so, in what position? Drower admitted that the answers sometimes just about determined whether a man got the position or not. The Ranginui mill manager Magnus Russell would employ only young men who played rugby [17].

Many of the mill workers employed at the mills in the surrounding area (Box 7.2; Fig. 7.6) were good rugby players, but they worked on Saturdays so they played on Sundays in Mangapehi or Benneydale. The Benneydale senior team included a lot of strong coal miners, until the mine closed (Chap. 5) and then they didn't have enough Benneydale men for a full team. Those that were left would not join another club so long as it had a name too closely linked with Pureora or Forestry, said Rusty Russell. So the name was changed to Bush United, and everyone joined.

The Bush United rugby team got only one or two training sessions a week, but was always up there with the leaders in local competitions, in part because the players were all so hard fit from the heavy manual work they did during the week. Unfortunately for them, that was the period when Colin "Pinetree" Meads, later a famous All Black, was playing for Waitete, the Te Kuiti club. Henry Flavell was picked for the Maori All Blacks shortly before his sudden death in a logging accident in February 1967.

But in 1973/74 they had an extremely successful season, winning the Maniapoto-Otorohanga Senior B competition with 16 wins in 16 games. In 1976 the club went on a trip to Australia, and four members won selection to represent the King Country (Sonny Anderson, Pae Wynard, Gordon Hill and Brian Cressy). In the 1977 season they won 17 of their 20 matches [17].

The history of the Bush United Rugby Football Club was summarized at a function celebrating 25 years of competition at Pureora, as reported by the local newspaper [8]. Club loyalty was impressive: six of the seven life members elected over the years returned for the club's silver jubilee: Graeme (Rusty) Russell (president for 18 of the 25 years), Alec Watts, Dick Porini, Dave Yanko, Bill Reti and Sonny Anderson.

There had always been a close relationship with Waitete Football Club off the field, at the same time as intense rivalry on it. So Waitete accepted the invitation to play the jubilee match, which Waitete won 13-6. The day was finished off with a Jubilee Ball at the clubrooms, catered to a very high standard for 220 ex-members and supporters by the Pureora women.

## The Football Club Bar

The first club house was built by volunteer labour ("we never had any trouble organizing working bees", said Rusty), using logs given by NZFS and cut by the Ranginui mill. Organisations like NZFS, the Ranginui Timber Mill managed by Magnus Russell, the Odlins Timber Mill managed by Jim Russell, and E&B Maraeroa managed by Bill Morton, all helped to keep things going.

Rusty Russell remembered the first club building as "like one of those old wild west hotels, guys flying out the windows…we [were all] young guys, we needed rugby, we needed sport, we needed our beer". Unfortunately for the men, Kitch Pedder, OC at the time, was legally obliged to maintain the ban on alcohol in the King Country. After one particularly wild party that ended with the theft of all supplies and all funds, the first clubhouse was forced to close down [13].

Within a few years, the Football Club had built a new, marginally legal bar in an area that was otherwise still dry. The bar was opened in 1954 and operated on restricted hours, with the knowledge of the Te Kuiti Police (better than sly grogging and house parties, or men driving home drunk from Benneydale, they said). It opened on Tuesday and Thursday after practices.

Kitch Pedder sometimes encountered consternation from the wives about their men returning home late from work. Sawmill managers were not helpful in backing him up by ensuring the bar closed on time, so that was yet another job for the OC. Ladies were not admitted to the club, which was in some ways a pity [13].

At first the accounts were not very well kept (because, said Jack Fyffe, "the guys running it were taking out more than was going in") and the Club ran up a £500 debt to Waikato Wines and Spirits. Then Rusty and Bluey McLennan took over the Committee, notified WW&S that the club was under new management, and undertook to pay off the debt if they would resume deliveries.

For nearly 20 years after that the club bar operated at a profit averaging about 30 % a year, which was ploughed back into football trips, the school, or any other community activity that needed support. The only problem was that the liquor store was vulnerable to break-ins, until it was rebuilt in concrete blocks with stronger locks.

In 1960 a new rugby clubhouse was built for the renamed Bush United FC, which cemented its role as the focal gathering place for the village community, both mill workers and forestry workers. Rusty remembered that the guys from different workplaces tended to sit in their own corners, but rivalries between Ranginui and Odlins people tended to settle down once they broached the bar. Anyone who still wanted to do battle would go outside; no-one would interfere, and the next minute they'd be back inside drinking again, each with a black eye.

Bruce Tricklebank, stalwart of the Volunteer Fire Brigade and its own bar, also played for Bush United so often drank at the Football Club bar after practices, and at weekends after games. There was no official connection between the two bars, and few people were actually members of both clubs, they just went to whichever one was open longest.

There were some people who simply didn't drink, but most who had been resident for a while ended up drinking more than they had before—including women—because there was not a lot else to do. Getting drunk was socially acceptable, except when it ended up causing neglected children and domestic assaults. John Mason remembered a regular stream of battered women turning up for comfort on the OC's doorstep, and some youngsters started drinking early because they saw their parents doing so much of it.

Nevertheless, the men were very discriminating in their drinking habits, and would not drink beers they disliked, such as the new brand "Lucky" beer, even when it was offered free in large quantities during a promotion campaign by NZ Breweries. The Barryville staff, regarded in Pureora as "rogues and vagabonds", had their own separate club, but would come over to Pureora at times.

According to Jack Walker, there must have been a few of those in Pureora too, judging by the number of disappearing NZ$20 bills [IOUs] that were put down to "the rats". But NZFS staff began to take a closer interest in the Club's accounts, and eventually they instituted a system

of bush justice to restrain "the rats". It was so effective that, if Rusty Russell had come back from Mangapehi with a truck load of beer (several hundred crates with 2 dozen bottles a crate) too late to unload it, he'd leave it parked in the driveway of his house, and nothing would be pinched while it was under his care.

The same did not apply to accidents supplying what the guys thought of as fair game. Rusty tells a story about a rail wagon that got derailed during shunting, and was stuck in a siding with broken crates of beer visible at both ends. There were "6–8 dry truck drivers down there a coupla times a day with a few cut fingers, [so] there weren't many full bottles left by the time the insurance assessors arrived. Jack Kenney had beer hidden in a culvert, he dived in and picked up a few bottles on every trip back".

Especially after the logging industry passed its 1950s–60s peak and the future of the village began to cloud over, successive OCs recognized the importance of encouraging the football club at Pureora, because it was the only sports and social organization available to the community. They supported it for years, but in the end, the mill closures and the departure of many NZFS staff in Pureora inevitably had a drastic effect on the club, and it could not field a team for the 1987 season. But it survived, because the club, complete with its clubhouse, moved to Benneydale and reformed with players from the new freezing works. The club celebrated its 50th Jubilee in 2005 [17].

## Other Sports

Women were ardent supporters of the efforts of their men on the rugby field, but they also wanted access to a sport they could play, and which did not involve travelling to facilities elsewhere. Tennis was widely popular with women and children as well as men, so in November 1950 the village tennis courts were officially opened (Fig. 8.5).

By 1951 the villagers were organizing successful sports days, with wood chopping (Figs. 8.12 and 8.13) and athletic events plus a dance in the evening, and hosting tennis tournament teams against Mangapehi at Pureora. Five years later there was a profitable working men's club and a billiard table at the fire station.

In the mid 1950s social life within the village was thriving. The Committee running the Football Club bar kept to a strict schedule for closing

**Fig. 8.12** New Zealand has a long history of forestry, which makes it a leading country in the international sport of wood chopping, and it has produced two world champions. Here a standing block competition is in progress at a Pureora sports day. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

**Fig. 8.13** This portrait of Sonny Bolstad, a champion axeman from a Rotorua club competing against Pureora men at an event in Benneydale, illustrates the strength and concentration required for competitive wood chopping. *Graeme Reinhardt*

hours (not always maintained in later years); complaints arising from Smith's survey about the state of the road frontages of the sawmill houses had been acted upon; and a canteen was being organized. Sandy Sunnex ran a cricket club, and helped to build the first club rooms.

Helen Russell and Mauven Yanko were keen members of the Country Women's Institute, which at first meant getting someone to drive them over to Maraeroa. In time they established a branch in Pureora, where they met first at the Football Club and later in the school staff room. They hosted other CWI groups and visited others, held competitions in cooking and floral arrangements, and organized wonderful Christmas parties. Every woman in the village was invited to go, and it was a very friendly group. Dorothy Seager would have gone more often if she had not been pregnant most of the time, she said.

NZFS provided a Quonset hut (a lightweight prefabricated building of corrugated galvanized steel, semicircular in cross section) to be used as a village hall, where films were shown regularly every Friday night by an independent projectionist. He paid 30 shillings a week for the hall and in turn charged 2/6 a ticket. The hall was invariably full, so this was apparently a profitable venture, and the entertainment was not limited to watching the film. Smith's sociological eye appreciated watching the audience more [13], especially the cat calls, the ribald comments on the charms of the heroine, and the audience's responses when, after every few hundred feet of film, the projector would break down. The hall was also used for dances and various other functions.

## Medical Care and the Pureora Ambulance

Logging villages need rapid access to medical facilities more than do most rural settlements. So Lew Hahn, the first OC of the Pureora project, started asking for an ambulance in 1947. An established service, provided by an old ex-army Dodge, sprung like a bullock dray, appeared in the records only in about 1954. It was staffed by

Forestry men on a roster, but part-funded by Carters and Odlins, since it served their employees too. It remained in service for 15 years, when it was replaced by an International ambulance. The old Dodge was transferred to other duties, and lasted until 1987.

The Labour Department employed a St John ambulance officer who went round all the logging camps training staff who wanted to obtain their First Aid certificates. All the Pureora staff had to know something about first aid, and all the ambulance crew had their certificates, plus occasional lectures from the visiting doctor on how to handle emergencies. Several Pureora women with nursing skills, including Mauven Yanko and Helen Russell, looked after minor problems in the village and acted as "patch-up person" after accidents in the bush.

The most frequent commissions required of the ambulance service were to take expectant women to Te Kuiti (53 km northwest) or Mangakino (33 km northeast) to have their babies. Ivan Frost's first outing as ambulance driver for this purpose ended after 33 km with a puncture at Kopaki. Ivan struggled to change the wheel, but the nuts would not come off. After a superhuman effort he had got only two of the five off, complete with studs, when suddenly out of the dark came a voice saying "Hey, I think you turn them the other way, eh". No-one had told Ivan that Dodges had left hand threads on their wheel nuts.

Sometimes the ambulance and its passenger got as far as Benneydale (22 km) before events overtook them, so to speak. At least one Pureora baby was born on the floor of the doctor's surgery there (after which the doctor ordered a brandy for the driver, Kitch Pedder, saying he needed it more than the mother did).

Another woman reached Mangapehi Post office (28 km), where the postmaster and his wife delivered the baby. The driver, Graham Bell, a single man, swore he would never again have anything to do with pregnant women. Fortunately, some women operated a mutual-help "you go with me this time and I'll go with you next time" system so they could often leave the guys (other than the driver) out of it.

Other mothers did not even get that far. Ivan Frost tells a story about a woman from Barryville whose husband could not leave their other children, so he had to drive down the road like a mad thing with her alone in the back. As they ran down the last hill to Benneydale she called out "I think it's coming!" Ivan debated whether to stop and deliver or keep on driving, but recalled the doctor saying that if it happens on the way it's usually straightforward, so he kept on driving.

In another couple of minutes he pulled up outside the doctor's house in a flurry of stones, and there was the baby already out and crying. "We cleaned the baby up, then back to the ambulance ….she's sitting there smoking a cigarette with the baby in her arms, and we're off to Te Kuiti….ah, one way and another it was rich living!" he chuckled [18].

Considering how inherently dangerous logging was, and that medical care was confined to weekly visits by a doctor and district nurse [16], Pureora had a commendably short casualty list for forty years' work (Box 8.1).

**Box 8.1. Safety record**

Only three deaths of NZFS personnel were recorded in the official annual reports.

15 September 1950: a bushman was killed by a log rolling on him.

16 January 1958: bush boss Kaipara Harris was killed when a matai he had just felled hit a dead tree which didn't break. The matai bounced back and caught Kaipara full in the chest. When Jack Fyffe got there he was lying beside the log with his Disston chain saw still running on the other side of it. Any such accident is dreadfully shocking for anyone, especially one that involves a very experienced bush man, but this one happened in front of Kaipara's teenage son Tom, who had just left school and was helping the logging gang.

23 February 1967: dozer driver Henry Flavell was killed instantly when a large tree, whose roots had rotted away, fell

across the cab of his D7 crawler tractor and crushed it. Immediate investigation showed no evidence of negligence by Flavell or any fault in NZFS procedures. Vibration from those heavy tractors on the fragile pumice soil was not a manageable problem, and no cab could have been made strong enough to resist such a blow.

Nevertheless, on 16 March Mrs. Flavell's lawyer came to inspect the site, and he initiated a claim for compensation. The case later got to the Supreme Court in Hamilton, and lasted more than three days before a jury. Mrs. Flavell got compensation for the loss of her husband and his income, but NZFS was exonerated. The Caterpillar company and their agents were concerned enough to ensure that D7 cabs were strengthened from then on [1: 174].

Non-fatal accidents were also relatively few, but included one man hit on head with loading hook, another with a broken leg, and a third (Des Bergman) who was hit by a falling tree, and would have been killed if he had not been wearing a helmet.

The most dramatic accident happened on 18 March 1950, when a heavily loaded Mack truck carrying a huge log from Pureora to the Maraeroa mill went off the pumice road into the soft verge. The log shot forward, demolishing the cab, jamming Bob Abraham, the driver, in his seat and breaking his leg. His mate was also hurt. It took a D8 dozer with a Hyster logging arch two hours to pull the log off and free them (Fig. 7.15). Both ended up in hospital.

Forestry is still a dangerous occupation, even now. No fewer than ten forestry workers throughout New Zealand were killed in 2013 [14].

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