

Charles Wright
His life and times in New Zealand
1936–1958

This unpublished account of his early days in New Zealand was written by Charles Wright in retirement, probably about 1990.

My life in New Zealand (from England via Australia) began with the arrival of the *Awatea* in Wellington on a cold, wet and very windy morning in April 1936. I reclaimed my extra-large leather trunk, which held all my worldly goods, from Customs and hired a cab to take me to any available inexpensive hotel located near the railway station.

A prolonged negotiation with the proprietor saw the trunk disappear into his cellar, and this left me free to begin my exploration of New Zealand with no other burden but a backpack. My immediate objective was to get passage on the night express to Auckland where the climate was said to be much warmer.

It was a good time to be in New Zealand. Michael Joseph Savage had taken the Labour Party to victory in the election only a few months before my arrival and his initial Christmas bonus to the unemployed (without distinction of race or sex) was already putting new heart into New Zealand. A wave of optimism was sweeping the country. This I learned from conversation with travellers in the jam-packed night express, and it put me in a happy frame of mind as I walked up Queen Street early next morning in warm sunshine. I was beginning to feel 'at home' within 24 hours of arriving in New Zealand.

Perhaps that is why I automatically gravitated towards a sign which said 'Bar'. Apart from the bartender, there was only one other gentleman, sitting at a table in one corner. I ordered a beer, found it good, and asked for another. Then in came a bunch of young 'kiwis', bespangled with books, who might have been university students on their way to lectures. They did not reject my offer of a round of beers, but they rapidly twigged I was a newly arrived 'pommie', and an interval of playful shiacking followed. We included the silent man in the corner in one round, but I noted that the students were reluctant to engage in conversation with him.

When the students left I moved over to the table of the silent man, and when I asked him if he lived in Auckland, his reply after a long interval 'Yer, Yer, Yersse' – and then I understood why he had not been included in our earlier conversation. He had a very bad stammer.

Nevertheless I persisted for quite a while, and as he became more fluent I found out that his sister had married one of my uncles, a geologist, who had stayed in Auckland briefly while returning from Captain Scott's ill-fated attempt to reach the South Pole some 30 odd years before. In effect he was the brother of my Aunt Phyllis! I never even knew that I had an aunt who originated in New Zealand and that her family name was Boyd before she married Raymond Priestley who, at the time of our present conversation, was the Vice Chancellor of Melbourne University in Australia. All this came as a complete surprise to me. We called for another beer and dug deeper into this unexpected relationship.

I was somewhat apprehensive at first, because I had decided to come to New Zealand as the one country in the world where I might escape the nepotistic influences that had dogged my steps in England, Canada and Australia. I had in fact come to New Zealand partly to avoid the well-meaning intentions and interventions of successful relatives. Now I had come across an unexpected relative on only my second day in New Zealand.

However it soon became clear that Jeff Boyd was not exactly in the category of a 'successful' relative since he had only a modest contract to split fence posts from forest trees in a remote locality near Lake Taupo, supplying posts to farmers in the Waikato. In fact he was in Auckland only on a brief visit to see how his three children were getting on in their boarding schools (paid for by the sale of fence posts) and to try and recruit someone to join him and his partner in their camp near an abandoned Maori village called Opa, to help split up the trees they were felling.

Would I be interested in such a job? An offer of a job like that was too tempting to refuse. New Zealand was turning out to be a wonderful place. Two days later I was in Jeff's vintage Reo heading back south for Mokai, the last centre of population before the abandoned Maori village of Opa.

Mokai turned out to be a village of sawmills, the terminus of a single-gauge railway line, and a lumber camp with a large draughty building for lodging passing travellers like ourselves. We reached there about midnight (delayed by the loss of a front wheel from the Reo which caused us to 'take bush' at 40 mph), cold and hungry. We got a few hours sleep on hard floor boards and awoke at 4 a.m. on a frosty morning in time to catch an empty truck going in the general direction of Opa. This was a ride across tussock grassland and very bumpy. It was almost a relief to leave the vehicle at the point where a 5 mile walk would bring us to Jeff's camp a short distance from the forest edge.

This we reached shortly after midday, battered and very, very hungry. Jeff's partner had a venison stew available and a newly made loaf of bread about 18 inches in diameter. Both disappeared in record time. The 'pommie' was learning what life in New Zealand could be like. Jeff's partner treated me like a Gift from the Gods, offered me a place in his tent, and sat down thoughtfully sharpening what appeared to be an eight-foot long cross-cut saw and an axe. Jeff's own tent housed his bed, a radio and all the camp supplies. Breakfast at 5 a.m. was a new venison stew and another monster loaf of bread, cooked by Jeff himself during the night.

Right away I was introduced to the job in hand. The other two did the actual felling of the massive totara trees. My first job was to clean any side branches off a felled tree, cut off the top of the tree at a point where the girth of the trunk dwindled to about 6 feet, using the axe, and begin sawing off the measured lengths, starting from the small end, single handed with a two-man crosscut saw! As soon as I heard a new tree crash down I knew that the other end of my saw would soon be occupied. Thus proceeded the work until by the end of the week we had about twenty lengths ready for splitting, which was a mallet-and-wedge operation for all hands. The totara was unbelievably easy to split evenly, and the resultant fence posts were neatly piled alongside the exit track.

For reasons that I did not understand at the time, removal of the posts always occurred on a Saturday night. An old Maori gentleman would materialise out of the dusk and load the posts onto a wide sledge drawn by two bullocks. Then he went off into the dark to make contact with one or more ancient trucks waiting with engines running out in the

tussock. When loaded, these ancient vehicles would move off for an undisclosed destination which they had to reach before daylight. I did comment on this strange procedure, but was told that the trucks would overheat in daytime! Many months later, when discussing totara ecology in the Opa area with the Chief Forester of the government in Wellington, it became apparent that we had been illegally felling totara within a forest reserve, but by then Jeff and his partner had removed themselves to a new location.

After about two months in the fence post business, Jeff went to collect his cash and on his return paid us for the work. He informed us that he would be away for several weeks and would be closing the camp at Opa. I had already begun to think of getting back to my leather trunk in Wellington, and asked him to advise me on the shortest route to catch a train going south. He scratched his head a bit and said that the main trunk line was just over a mountain behind our camp and recommended that I might consult a Maori family living in a cave near Opa for instructions on how to intercept a train. Before they left they took me to this family and left me at the mouth of a cave, which proved to be a sort of tunnel excavated in a very thick layer of pumice. There I awaited the return of the owners of the cave, one of whom proved to be our bullock driver who collected the posts. Since he spoke a little English I was able to learn that, if I climbed the mountain immediately above us and climbed any tree at the summit, I would see Lake Taupo. There I should take a compass bearing to the south-west and keep on this bearing for a day or so until I hit the railway somewhere in the vicinity of Waimiha, a small place where trains usually stopped for lumber and passengers.

Jeff had given me as a parting gift a whole loaf of his bread, and thus equipped I was ready to set OK This suggestion did not equate with Maori concepts of hospitality and I was urged to spend the night with them in their cave before leaving at dawn next day. The old Maori agreed to come with me to show me the easiest route up the mountain, to start me OK It turned out to be a night to remember with roast wild pig, venison cutlets, various edible roots and several pints of local rum. I slept very soundly on a sort of pumice shelf carved out at the back of the cave.

Next morning and true to his promise the old man showed me an easy route up the lower half of the mountain, and waved me upwards as he stumbled unsteadily back home. I reached the summit about 3 pm and, following instructions, found a tree that was climbable and tall enough to give a fine view of Lake Taupo. I noted the correct back-bearing for my onward route and, since it was growing dark, set about finding somewhere to sleep.

As it was almost mid-winter when nights are cold, I collected a big heap of dry fern leaves and burrowed out a central compartment to sleep in. This was quite comfortable for a time, but I was disturbed by a large damp nose pushing in to share my space. This was my first encounter with a New Zealand wild pig, a very large animal but fortunately a female, lacking large tusks. When she found that I resisted her advances, she backed off but continued to root around my pile of bracken for the rest of the night. But at first light she was gone.

Following my compass bearing faithfully I clawed my way through thorny vines and tangled trees for a whole day until, in the afternoon, I came to a wide valley with a shallow stream flowing northwards. The water was very cold but the stony and gravelly margin of the stream was warm and easy to hollow out to make a good sleeping place.

It was still daylight when I ate the last of my bread and fell asleep. I awoke to a clear but cold moonlit midnight. Something was pulling at my foot and my old shoulder pack was being attacked by a large number of duck-like creatures who seemed to be captivated by the metal rings and other things which shone bright in the moonlight. 'Maybe these are the wekas I have been told about' thought I, and tried to coax them closer. In this they were not cooperative, and the rest of the night passed pleasantly enough though I had to extract the coat of my one respectable suit to keep me warm.

Following faithfully on the compass bearing all the following day, I climbed up and down several steep slopes, slipping into a deep pool of cold water on two occasions. I was still wearing my good suit coat and at the end of the day it looked quite worn out. This third night was spent under a large boulder on a bed scraped out of the pumice soil.

The fourth day, still on the magic compass bearing, was also a day of ups and downs, clawing my way through acres of spiny vines. My pants were now in rags, so I took the pants that matched my good suit out of the pack and put them on, discarding the old ones to rot in the wilderness. There was always plenty of water to drink in the many streams that I crossed, but this type of New Zealand bush seemed to be singularly void of anything edible. In the night it rained hard and I got well soaked. By now I was wondering if I had passed the Main Trunk railway hidden in one of its many tunnels and began to look forward to reaching the west coast of the North Island. However at daybreak I was heartened to hear a distant peep-peeping which suggested human activity nearby. In my haste to track this down, I leapt into action, heading towards the noise, completely forgetting to pick up my faithful prismatic compass. No matter, by 7am I had reached the source of the peeping, an old whiskery gent sitting by a moving wire, to which were chained logs moving steadily towards some sawmill.

When he saw me he gave a carillon of peeps which stopped the logs, and then demanded to know where I was coming from. To keep the conversation short, I answered 'Lake Taupo'. He shook his whiskers in disbelief and said 'No one ever comes from there'. 'How can I go to Waimiha on the Main Trunk?' says I, quickly followed by 'Where is the nearest place that I can get something to eat?' Says he, 'There is a mill cookhouse about 4 miles along this wire, but breakfast is long done. Ask my daughter, who runs the cookhouse, to rustle something up for you. Just follow the wire, but watch out for moving logs'. And he went about his job, peeping to get the wire moving again.

In due course I followed his suggestion and asked his daughter if there was any food available. She looked at me strangely and admitted that she could provide some bacon and eggs. 'How many eggs?' says she. 'About 6 or 10' says I. 'With bread?' says she. 'A couple of loaves will do nicely' says I.

After a most satisfying meal I asked about onward transport to Waimiha. She pointed to a large truck loading lumber nearby and advised me to help the driver with the loading and ask for a passage to the Main Trunk railway depot. Despite my long refuelling session in the cookhouse I still had time to help with the loading of the truck. I doubt if I will ever experience anything so painful as handling damp, rough raw planks with hands so thoroughly lacerated by thorns as mine were.

Approaching Waimiha, I asked the driver if there might be some place where I could

get a hot bath. He recommended a small boarding house near the railway station. I presented myself there and asked humbly if a hot bath and a meal might be available for a traveller going south to Wellington. The lady who ran the boarding house happened to be away in Taumaranui for the day but her young daughter took one long look at me and said she would draw a bathfull of warm water and see what she could find in the way of cold meat. There followed a blissfull hour of soaping and soaking which left the bath ringed with black stains.

I cleaned up as best I could and poked my nose into the dining room. There on a table in the comer was a saddle of cold mutton which I took to be the promised nourishment. I still had a few hours left until a train was due so I reduced the joint to clean bones, only to hear a quiet voice say 'My goodness. You have eaten the boarders' evening meal'.

Out of kindness of heart the young lady accepted some cash and went back into the kitchen to see what else she could contrive for the boarders that night. I went down to the station to await the arrival of the solitary stationmaster, only to be disconcerted by the news that the southbound night express no longer stopped at Waimiha. The only possibility was to ask the guard of the goods train, due to arrive an hour or so ahead of the express, to give me passage. But, he warned, the guard was a bit cranky and might not pick me up, or, worse, the goods train might be delayed and the night express pass Waimiha before it arrived.

He advised me to talk to the goods train guard and hint that I was particularly partial to a few hands of poker. This I did when the goods train arrived on time and, although not a noteworthy poker player, I succeeded in winning enough of the guard's hard earned cash to pay for my ticket from Taumaranui to Wellington on the night express, which arrived in Taumaranui only minutes after the goods train pulled in.

In Wellington I had some trouble explaining to the hotel owner that I was the same guy who had deposited a trunk with him some three months ago. Once settled in, I found some reasonable clothing to wear in Wellington and began sorting through the many introductions I had been given to persons of interest in the capital city. After a few days the dining room staff learned to bring me second, even third helpings of all that was on the menu without me asking. As you will note, I still have vivid recollections of my first months in New Zealand.

Amongst the recommendations I had been given by friends in England and Australia were many to Government officials, University professors, and private citizens interested in botany and biology in general. I rang many very interesting and helpful New Zealanders. Some recommended a visit to the South Island, where casual employment was blooming. A visit to Bob Semple, Minister of Public Works and Transport, got me a job helping in the construction of the Homer Tunnel, which lasted for a few months until an avalanche of snow came down and blocked the tunnel entrance.

Thence I went down to Invercargill and found another temporary job on a boat dredging for oysters in Foveaux Strait. We had to shelter occasionally at Oban, the most populous centre of Stewart Island. There I made many new friends, including the forest ranger and his family and Miss Noeline Baker, to whom I had an introduction. She persuaded me to leave the oyster business and to come ashore to help her with her large garden of mainly native plant species collected from the slopes and summit of Mt Anglem. She had built a

most impressive house on a small peninsula near Day's Bay and was contemplating the purchase of some nearby forest to create a botanical reserve.

Part of my job was to catalogue the native tree species in several possible alternative sites and try to sort out their ecological relationships, and part of the time was spent helping my host in weeding her garden, thus providing me with an opportunity to learn to recognise and name some of the rare plants in her very fine collection. At night she would play music from her abundant selection of records, coming out of a huge old-fashioned 'His Master's Voice' style trumpet, jet black in colour, polished daily and so large that one wondered how she originally got it into the house. Men were accommodated in a separate wing, and in all the many visits that I paid to this remarkable house, I was never allowed to visit the upstairs section, which was reserved for lady guests. On some evenings she would reminisce about her youthful days when her father was Surveyor General of New Zealand, responsible for planning the layout of future towns such as Gore and Invercargill.

I think it may not be too far fetched to say that it was my casual acquaintance with the vegetation of Stewart Island that first gave me the idea that plants might be able to condition the quality of soils to a degree that could determine the path of plant succession, and hence might become a significant factor in analysing the composition of the present vegetation, and likewise help in assessing the trend in soil development. I had arrived in New Zealand with only the standard B.Sc. degree from Leeds University in England, and for my first six months in New Zealand I found that most of my university knowledge (acquired at considerable expense) was of little help to me in elucidating the secrets of the New Zealand landscape. Ecology, which is essentially the relationship between landscape, rocks, soil, vegetation and people, was not a subject on the university curriculum of that period. Indeed ecology was still being advertised as 'oecology', something marginal to pure science. On Stewart Island I began to look at soils as a something which might be worth studying.

Before I left the Island, I visited Mason Bay with my one-armed friend the forest ranger, whose parents came from the Orkney Isles, and he introduced me to the famous flightless New Zealand bird, the kiwi. We sat one night on tussock grass surrounded by kiwis, many of whom were stamping hard with their feet to stir up the earthworms in the soil, their heads tilted to one side, checking the direction and depth of their meal before thrusting their long curved bill down the hole to haul up a delicious morsel. Another time we sat quietly in a very smelly cave to wait for the mutton birds to come home from their day on the sea. As darkness fell we were suddenly assaulted by dozens of these birds, flying in at full tilt and then thudding to rest on their accustomed ledges. The owners of the ledges now occupied by us, thudded against us and then tried to persuade us to move over. By this time we were both smelling like mutton birds and perhaps that is why they accepted our unexpected presence. What a wonderful place was New Zealand where land birds could not fly but accepted your presence and seabirds thudded onto your lap and only expected you to move over a bit.

By now my cash reserve was running low and I wanted to see more of this exciting country, working my way slowly northwards back to Auckland. I returned to Invercargill and began by walking round the Catlins, cutting across to Balclutha. Then a train ride to Gore, a truck ride to Tapanui and a long walk over the hills to Central Otago. A quick look at Queenstown and then a ride on a motorbike pillion seat along the eastern

foothills of the Southern Alps to meet a party from the Wellington Alpine Club who hauled and pushed me up Mt Denniston.

It was sheep shearing time in the valley, and so I did what all new pommies are supposed to do in New Zealand, stuffing fleece into sacks, cleaning floors, and finally trying out the shears. In an improved financial position I visited Christchurch University and was invited to visit a moa graveyard on my way to Nelson Province and the Cawthron Institute. Thence over to Wellington and by train once again to Auckland, making contact with the Auckland University staff, in particular a Mrs Lucy Cranwell who took time off to take me to Huia and a walk through the hills to the west coast with a group of botanical enthusiasts.

Back again in Auckland, I set my eyes on North Auckland and the interesting-looking 'panhandle' that sticks out into the sub-tropics and the Pacific Ocean. I very much wanted to meet the famous kauri plants of North Auckland. By a magnificent stroke of luck I ran out of money in Whangarei town and asked around to see if any casual jobs were offering. Someone told me that a guy called Norman Taylor wanted a labourer to dig soil pits, and that his office was in the Whangarei Harbour Board Building. I smartly found this edifice and an office labelled 'New Zealand Soil Survey Division, DSIR', on the ground floor, knocked on the door and was invited to enter. It was Norman Taylor in person and he said the job was still open, 14 shillings a day and a 5 day week. This sounded good to me and, when he asked me where I came from and what had I been doing in New Zealand, I told him that I had graduated from Leeds University in England, had a BSc with honours in botany and zoology, and had been wandering around in New Zealand, looking at trees, soils, geology, landscapes, seascapes, kiwis and muttonbirds.

He said 'Can you report here to work tomorrow at 8 am? Where are you staying? Do you need an advance? Can you come back with me for supper at home and meet the family?' In such a manner a life-long friendship was begun, and for the next 10 years I became virtually a de-facto member of the Taylor family. We must have talked steadily until 6 p.m., when we jumped into his old model A Ford which he revved quickly up a steep hill and on to his home on the outskirts of town.

The family consisted of Mrs Nell Taylor and two boys, Sidney aged 10 and Rowley aged 8. It was a most harmonious evening and within a few days I had become an ex-officio member of Norman's delightful family, sleeping in a large cupboard converted into a very comfortable bunk room. When Norman and Nell were both away on visits to relatives, they left the kids and the house and car in my care. This was the point where I really became a kiwi in place of a pommie. Norman was in process of teaching himself to become a real soil scientist. At that time few textbooks on soils were available in New Zealand, and thus we were both in a situation where we had no alternative to accepting the soils themselves as our best source of information. The landscape became virtually our only textbook. Norman was the one who interpreted the influence of landform, geology and climate on soil formation. My contribution was to relate this to vegetation, plant distribution and soil-plant relationships of significance to land use. We evolved a mixture of soil science and assessment of probable ecological influences of importance to land use. Much of our time was spent in talking with farmers, foresters, gumdiggers, road engineers etc, to learn their experience with local soils. All this was basic information needed to create a meaningful soil map, first for Whangarei County and subsequently for all North Auckland. There were only three of us involved in the field work - Norman,

who planned the day to day programme, Charlie Sutherland, an ex-farmer captured and trained in soil survey by Norman, and myself. It was better than just writing a book with maps, we were actually reading a book of natural history that had never yet been written. The fourth member of the team was a youthhl graduate of the local high school, Douglas Bergmann by name, who was our draftsman but soon became my own field assistant. We were a very happy team and all of North Auckland became our oyster.

We were working for the Soil Survey Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) of the Government of New Zealand. After a few days my casual labour status was changed to Soil Surveyor 3rd Class with DSIR. My daily pay of 14/- dropped to 7/-, payable monthly. No matter, I was so interested in the soil-plant relationships that I was finding in North Auckland that I would willingly have worked for free.

It was in north Auckland that I first realised that perhaps some of the more ancient, primitive coniferous species in which there was an imbalance between low nitrogen uptake by the roots and a relatively high production of carbohydrates from the foliage. The only way a tree could maintain a proper C/N ration for normal cell growth was to convert the excess sugars into fats and resins that were got rid of through storage in the bark tissues and in old leaves. When shed by the tree in the normal course of growing, this resinous material built up as a thick layer on the soil surface, as an acid peaty superficial soil horizon which was slow to decay and which promoted strong leaching of the underlying mineral soil. One could imagine that this impress on the mineral soil might diminish in tropical climates and come so severe in cold climates that natural regeneration by seed might be inhibited.

I had a lot of fun with this theoretical concept long after I left New Zealand, pursuing araucaceous species up into New Caledonia and Fiji and southwards into southern Brazil and Chile (where *Fitzroya* turns out to be an almost exact counterpart of Kauri in New Zealand). Several millions of years later new genera of coniferous trees evolved a better way of partly balancing their carbon/nitrogen problem by attracting nitrogen-fixing microorganisms to reside within some of their root cells. Such an adaption has, for example, permitted the genus *Pinus* to succeed over a wide range of climates and even to maintain dominance on certain soils despite the subsequent evolution of the much more energy-efficient angiosperm trees many millions of years later. Such were the crazy ideas that took root in my mind during my second year in New Zealand.

In due course the team of Taylor, Sutherland, Bergemann and Wright moved on from Whangarei country to reconnoitre the rest of North Auckland. What made this particularly interesting to me was that we were often in locations where Maori farmers predominated. Norman Taylor had grown up alongside Maoris in Huia and Auckland and had also worked on pioneer soil surveys in the Waikato, Te Kuiti, Mairoa and Taupo districts. Consequently he was a mine of information concerning on methods used by the early Maoris to adapt the sub-tropical and tropical food plants they brought with them to the much colder soils of New Zealand. He showed us soils that had been long ago darkened by applications of charcoal to increase their capacity to warm up more rapidly on sunny days and to increase their ability to adsorb and retain plant nutrients. By such means the Maori could maintain some of their introduced food plants, sustaining themselves until they had sorted out what was edible in their new environment.

All this was meat and drink to me, who was still trying to assemble knowledge about the relationships between plants and soils. Norman also added a new dimension for me by showing me how to recognise moa crop stones, which can be found in many topsoils in New Zealand. The moa, now long extinct, was a large flightless bird which swallowed small hard stones, accumulated in its crop to help digestion of hard plant residues. Moas were relatively easily killed for meat by the early Maori, and the crop stones were left in the soil as a record of their passing.

So now I had to think about the relationship between soils, plants and animals. Really, Norman was showing us how to read nature as if it were a textbook - just as well since his library at that time contained only one soil textbook, a translation of a Russian book at that. Almost every day he turned a few more pages of his book of nature, and we lapped the lessons up. We were way ahead of most published textbooks on soils of the time.

While we were being educated in North Auckland, the Soil Survey Division of DSIR was beginning to be regarded with some favour by Michael Joseph Savage's Labour Government. It probably helped a bit that Norman knew the Prime Minister from the days of his early struggles in the Auckland electorate, and was able to discuss matters on a first name basis. On one occasion, a Sunday, Norman was invited to take tea with M.J.S and for devilment took me along too. Complete informality, exciting discussion about how soil maps should be used, and lots of obscure jokes about political aspirants that went over my head, I came away liking Michael Joseph Savage very much indeed.

One result of this tea-party was that we got an assurance that the Labour Government would stand behind Norman's idea that the Soil Survey Division of DSIR should evolve into a kind of 'Soil Bureau' with a central research and field experimental station, to replace our present chemical laboratory currently located in an empty garage premises near the House of Parliament in Wellington. This would require a certain amount of manipulation of the DSIR, controlled by Dr Ernest Marsden, and might take time to evolve, but at least we now knew the Premier would support our scheme if it became a real possibility.

By now the Soil Survey Division of DSIR had small parties mapping soils in Central North Island, Wairarapa, Palmerston North, Canterbury, Timaru and Otago, all doing good work but all working almost independently. There was a growing need for a Central Soil Bureau, which could house and expand chemical analysis and bring a measure of uniformity into the soil mapping procedure.

Up to this point my contact with Dr Marsden had been minimal, but I did have a hitherto unused formal introduction to him from a friend in England, and I also knew that he was a scientific colleague of my father, who was currently Director of the National Physical Laboratory of the British Admiralty in England. So I sent him the letter of introduction and received a blast from Dr Marsden for concealing my identity while in his employment.

It then appeared that he had earlier had a letter from my father asking him about my progress in New Zealand, to which Marsden had replied that he had no knowledge of my presence in New Zealand. All the worse, since he had known me as a small boy when he stayed for some days in our old home in Weybridge, England. Once again I had come up against my old problem of nepotism, and I told him that this was why I had not visited or consulted with him since I had arrived in New Zealand.

I also mentioned that I was very happy learning from Norman Taylor how to make soil maps and that we were in need of a Central Soil Bureau to better co-ordinate all the various soil surveyors' activities in his employ. It seems that he did take this matter up with the politicians because the creation of a National Soil Bureau subsequently became elevated to the planning stage. All the above events happened in my fourth year in New Zealand.

Meanwhile the Taylor gang was finishing off the Reconnaissance Soil Map of North Auckland and contemplating a move to reconnoitre the soils of the rest of the Auckland Province. Up to this point I had been using Norman's 'Old Peg', a model A Ford, to move me around, since he was increasingly involved with Dairy Board officials, Forestry Department rangers, Agricultural Department extension officers etc, whose activities were now being stimulated by the existence of our soil maps. By now I could afford to buy my own car, and I secured an old 1924 model of a Morris Cowley - the one with a lovely brass nose, lots of room for soil samples and a collapsable canvas roof. As owner of such a magnificent vehicle I thought it proper to acquire a legal driver's licence (this matter had not been observed while driving Old Peg), and sought the assistance of Doug Bergmann's older sister, who did have a valid licence to drive a car.

We set off one afternoon from Whangarei town, heading for a north-eastern coastal village with me at the wheel. We wound our way up tortuous narrow roads, safely negotiating several large timber-loaded lorries (usually met on blind bends) and eventually reached the sea. It was then that I noticed that my instructor was unusually pale and shrunken, which I assumed was because she would prefer to take the wheel on the trip back. She recoiled with horror at this suggestion, and remained silent and withdrawn for all the voyage home, which involved several encounters with empty timber trucks driving somewhat faster and more erratically than when loaded. She barely managed to say 'Thanks for the trip' when I deposited her at the gate of the house in Whangarei where she and Douglas lived. She did however secure me a note from her JP boss to the effect that I could be given a licence to drive, and this was duly processed by the Traffic Department. I became the proud possessor of a driver's licence at last.

Since I was due for some months of accumulated leave, I got permission from Norman to take off on a trip in my Brass Nose to the Hauraki Plain and the Coromandel Peninsular, making notes on soils and vegetation which I sent back to Norman in the Whangarei office. He was well pleased with these and told me to press on to Rotorua and the East Coast and eventually into the Wairarapa and to Wellington. The Brass Nose enjoyed the trip as much as its driver.

In Wellington I visited the office of the Soil Survey Division and the Director (Dr Leslie Grange) took me to meet Dr Marsden. We discussed Norman's idea of creating a central Soil Bureau somewhere in the Hutt Valley, and I also got permission to extend my leave to make an official visit to the Soil Survey teams then working in the South Island. This provided me with a chance to revisit Nelson, Christchurch, Timaru, Central Otago and Southland, and to spend a few days in the field with the various soil survey teams. Naturally I kept going until I reached Invercargill, where the Brass Nose was briefly left to undergo essential welding, while I crossed over by ferry to Stewart Island, not yet visited by soil surveyors.

Many weeks elapsed before I got back to Wellington, but my diary of soil-plant-animal

land use potential relationships found favour at headquarters and I headed back to Whangarei full of new ideas. There I found that work on a soil reconnaissance map of the North Island was making rapid progress and was arousing considerable interest from the Agricultural and Forestry Services, the erosion control branch of the Public Works Department and the New Zealand Armed Services. The latter found our maps valuable because they showed soil or landform conditions that might be anticipated on cross-country military maneuvers.

Somewhere about this period Norman decided to buy a house in Lower Hutt and to move his family closer to the Soil Survey headquarters in Wellington. My brass nosed Moms Cowley had finally disintegrated from hard use, and I bought a 1934 Austin saloon to take its place. There was a gap in our North Island Soil Reconnaissance map between Te Kuiti and Wanganui, a block of very rough 'tiger' country with deplorable access roads, where the soils had to be mapped on my way south to Lower Hutt.

The creation of a Soil Bureau was by now assured, and Norman and I spent much of our time looking for a suitable site, examining locations on both sides of the Lower and Upper Hutt side valleys. Finally we found a very suitable location within easy walking distance of Taita Station (and the Taita pub). Government agreed to purchase the land and a small wooden hut was installed for me to live in and act as watchman. In due course the main buildings began to be erected, and administrative staff, some soil chemists and soil physicists, paid regular visits to plan their laboratories. Meanwhile the surrounding hills were subdivided by firebreaks, and access roads planned to areas designated for the study of soil development under various stages of growth of the natural vegetation.