

MANAWATU OUTDOOR SHOOTING

1914 – 2024

One of the earliest clubs known to be shooting outdoor was the 1914 Linton Miniature Rifle Club. This was on Government reserve land at Hokowhitu, now the site of the Massey University campus.

At a meeting with the Linton Defence Rifles in early 1915, it was decided that the 2 clubs should amalgamate, however, later in the same year the Government closed the range to club shooting. This left the Defence Club without a range, so the then President, Mr Hugh Akers, arranged the lease of property in King Street, Palmerston North, where he erected a 4 mound 25-yard indoor range. This was at a cost of £600 (\$1,200). Except for Territorial training, there was no further outdoor shooting carried out in the Manawatu for many years.

Outdoor shooting resumed after the Second World War when a bunch of enthusiasts gathered together and shot on a property on the left-hand side of the road just before crossing the bridge over the Kahuterawa stream on SH 57 at Linton, there were no formal competitions organised and the range consisted of bare land with a few targets stuck up against a bank.

The next known outdoor club was the Mount Biggs (Feilding) Club which began shooting in 1947 at Lees Line, Feilding, on Mr Master's property. In 1953, the Dewar International Cup match was shot on this range. This club continued shooting well into the sixties.

By 1968 the Rifle, Rod and Gun Club had purchased a property at Tiritea, and the first building erected on the range was a covered mound to accommodate 26 shooters. The first recorded shoot was held on November 24th, 1968, with top scores by Barry Lissington and Robin Carrington.

In 1969 the inaugural National Outdoor Championships were held on the Tiritea range beginning on April 5th. The Randle Trophy International match was shot on the first morning when a team captained by Mrs E Hounsell (Wanganui) put on a good score. Mrs F Knaggs (Waikato) top scored with 399.19. The Inter-Island match resulted in a win to the North Island (Captain-R A Weston). The New Zealand Open title match was shot in cold and windy conditions with Brian Lacey (Levin) winning by a narrow margin of one inner over Doug Rummins (Manawatu), with Barry Lissington (Manawatu) finishing fourth. A surprise at this shoot was the failure of Olympic Games medallist Ian Ballinger who could only finish fifth. Crellan Hooper (Manawatu) won the New Zealand 50 metre title by two points over Lou Wilton (Wairarapa).

The Nationals were held at RR&G again in 1974.

1975 saw the start of a club league organised by the Auckland Outdoor Club. This was a series of interclub matches shot under postal conditions. The Secretary at the time was Miss Enid Douglas, a Scottish lady who earlier was the Shooting Training Officer for the Commonwealth Games team in 1974. The matches were discontinued mainly through lack of communication, and interest waned.

Prize shoots were organised by the Rifle, Rod and Gun Club until the mid-1980's and the Manawatu Association from the mid 1980's onward.

1980 saw the first South Pacific Regional Championships take place in Christchurch, and then in 1984 RG (Dick) Weston our first Manawatu shooter attended them shooting in the Men's 3 position B team and the Men's air rifle A team. 1986 saw Betty Hooper make the Women's 50m Prone team, and in 1988 Betty again made the Women's 50m prone team, with Kelvin Burt making the Men's 50m prone B team.

During the mid-1980s members of the Rifle, Rod and Gun Club had a reciprocal competition with New Caledonia with each entity making two overseas visits to the other. The disciplines contested included air rifle, 50m prone and some pistol events.

The RR&G range was universally disliked by many top shooters as the windy conditions caused many low scores, and organisers of the events found it impossible to attract sufficient entries to make it worth continuing. The Manawatu Open Championships were moved and held in conjunction with the Tararua Outdoor Club, firstly in Hokio Beach Road behind Lake Horowhenua and then at Waitarere Beach, on Mark Pescini's farm.

The mid 1990s saw smallbore and air rifle shooting gain in popularity nationally with junior shooters from around the country descending on the Manawatu to study at Massey University or work in Palmerston North. Shooting in Manawatu saw the ranks swell in both the indoor and outdoor clubs accordingly as Manawatu had plenty to offer.

Three of these individuals of note are Paul Brown, Sally Johnston, and Ruth McNair (nee Stuart). All three were selected for the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur. Sally placed third for the bronze medal in the Women's 50m prone event.

Late in the 1990s participation in the outdoor section of RR&G had declined to the point that the section was not operating.

On the 20th of October 1997, a small group of shooters from across several the Manawatu indoor clubs and the remnants of the RR&G outdoor section held a meeting chaired by then MSRA president Martin Hunt and formed the "Manawatu Outdoor Club" (the name was later amended to be the Manawatu Outdoor **Smallbore Rifle** Club so it wouldn't be mistaken for a bunch of nudists). The founding members were David Green, Don Wright, Ross Lomas, Craig Morris, Kelvin Burt, John Bramley (first club President), John Hughes, Stuart Cawood and Peter Price.

In the early 2000s it was suggested that perhaps Manawatu could once again run the Outdoor National Championships. In true Manawatu fashion, it wasn't long before a plan to upgrade the RR&G number two range had been formulated, funding through grants and charities had been obtained, and a willing group of workers was assembled from the MOSRC, the Manawatu Association members and the Taylor family from Horowhenua.

In 2002 the Manawatu Open Championships, along with the Tararua Open Championships, came back to the RR&G range. This was to enable shooters to get some game time on the range well before the Nationals returning

By the end of 2003 the range upgrade was completed, including the purchase of a full set of "Mason" target changers.

The Outdoor Nationals were hosted on the upgraded range in 2004 and ran successfully considering that the Manawatu floods of 2004 occurred at the same time causing the displacement of some shooters and transport issues for many around the region.

The Nationals have become a regular event in Manawatu ever since, with the event held in 2008, 2012, 2016, 2018 and most recently in 2024 when the event was run in a joint effort at the RR&G range by Wanganui and Southern Hawkes Bay Associations. Some of the popularity was due to the closing of the range in Ardmore leaving a limited number of venues able to host 24 shooters shooting shoulder to shoulder for the North vs South Island matches.

In the early 2000s a change to island, national and international team selection came about with the removal of the selectors and island and national team selection becoming purely based on an aggregate of scores from the graded and open events held at the National Championships which captures those that are in form during the event.

International team selection particularly for the Oceania Championships is now made from the best scores from a series of Designated Matches that are held around New Zealand. Manawatu became a venue for a 50m prone and air rifle Designated Match in 2005, and in 2006 a 3-position match was added to the itinerary. The Designated Matches continue to this day, but the Tararua open championships ended in 2007 and were replaced by a sweepstake shoot on the Saturday to satisfy any pre-event training requirements prior to the designated match.

2009 saw record numbers for the Manawatu events with 19 3-position shooters and 72 50m prone entries.

Those who wish to aspire to World Cups, Commonwealth Games, and the Olympics are required to achieve minimum qualifying scores both locally and overseas.

The Manawatu OSRC has had many members attend the Oceania Championships under the designated match selection process and has also produced our first two "home grown" Commonwealth games athletes, with Martin Hunt competing in the 50m Men's Prone event at Glasgow in 2014 and Janet Hunt competing in the 50m Women's Prone event at the Gold Coast in 2018, after meeting the required selection criteria for those events.

The close of the 2022-2023 season saw the Manawatu Outdoor SRC in a healthy state with 15 members, many of whom shoot at the club regularly as well as attending numerous open championships, and showing a strong representation at the outdoor national championships. The RR&G range still remains challenging to shoot on but on a good day, good scores can be obtained.

Smallbore Outdoor shooting in the Manawatu looks to have a bright future provided the current level of member enthusiasm can be maintained, as well as good relationships remain to support access to a cost effective and compliant shooting range.

