

TOKOMARU MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB

1930 – 1939

The Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company opened its line through the district in 1886, and this created an impact of which had not been seen before.

The WMR Company had been promised by the Government of the day, grants of crown land when the rail link to Longburn was completed. The company, as part of its contracts conditions, was to subdivide the land into farm blocks and house sections for the early settlers. The public auction of this land was held in Wellington on June 24th 1887, and now consists of the Tokomaru township.

The early years saw the most activity when 6 flax mills were opened in the nearby Makerua and Opiki areas and the local cheese factory was opened. Two accommodation houses were built to provide housing for the workers in these industries.

By the early 1920s, Tokomaru was a thriving settlement and this was probably one of the most productive periods in the history of the area. However, by the late 1920s, the flax industry had begun to wane, and the local residents were showing a keen interest in the rising sport of shooting.

At a meeting in 1930, the Tokomaru Miniature Rifle Club was formed with Mr Williams being elected as President and Mr H Moody as Secretary, and a decision was made to affiliate with the Manawatu Miniature Rifle Association with N and K Whyte being elected as club delegates.

The depressed economy of the times and the lack of transport saw the club later withdraw from interclub matches, and the closing of the flax mills caused a loss of membership which made it difficult to survive.

In later years, the Manawatu Association divided its competitions into 3 sections so as to reduce travelling costs and the club was able to maintain teams in these matches against Moutoa, Levin and Shannon, although the results were not very successful.

The Second World War brought competition to a halt and the club ceased to exist.

Some of the mainstays shooting in this era were Joe McNeill, Brian Waldin, Arthur Rowlands, Joe Liggins, Basil Stokes and members of the Whyte families. One of the more notable families over this period was the Free family who were sharemilkers in the area for 40 years, and still maintain a link with shooting today with the operation of a Sportsworld store in Palmerston North.

Another member who did his early shooting at Tokomaru was Keith (Moose) Osman. In post war years, Keith went on to win the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association Championships 7 times. He also represented New Zealand in the World Running Boar Championships at Melbourne in 1973, and was also a top trap shooter.

Shooting was later revived at Tokomaru in 1946, when the rifle range, which had been built during the war on Terry Kelly's farm by the New Zealand Army, was reopened by the Linton Defence Rifle Club. This range, which was on the southern bank of the river upstream from the bridge, was used for many years until it had to be closed owing to the continued development of the area.

