

Did We Get it Right at the Whakamaru Bluffs

The Whakamaru Bluffs from Pokuru Road in the West, to Okama Road in the East and boundaried by several farmers and the Waikato river is all part of the DOC estate. This is a recount of the beginning of the harvesting of the merchantable timber from those Bluffs.

In July 1993, just after the Log price crash, I was asked to visit a farm that overlooks the Whakamaru Bluff from the Southern side of the Waikato River. The Farm Manager was Ross Groube and he had some scattered Pine trees that would produce High Density Pulp and a couple of loads of sawlogs. If you know the area at all these trees were on the highest point about a 1/2 km back from the edge. The Trig station sites at 609 meters and these trees were on the hill behind that at about 750m above sea level. The particular knob looks like Ayers rock only green and flat on top. This was definitely not a winter logging job. In the November of 1993 we eventually took 615 tonnes off this operation on Groube's property of which 60 tonnes were AO (SED 50 cm LED 100 cm) sawlogs that went to Tregoweth's sawmill in Te Kuiti. There was no need for a Resource Consent as the area harvested was not greater than a hectare and there was no major earth works for roading.

At the same time I visited John McAdam who had the farm next door and had only a few scattered trees with 2 short rows of trees around his house. I made an offer to John for the trees but as they were 85% pulp and only a small volume they weren't going to provide a big income so he was not interested in having his trees harvested at the time.

The Groube property operation did go ahead using a D85 Komatsu Tractor and Logging Arch, Rubber Tyred Loader and

four men. The operation was supervised by CHHF Kinleith Harvesting Department after the woodlot had been secured by the myself as the Marketing Department Purchase Wood representative.

The association with Ross Groube and talking about pulp wood and neighbours lead to discussions with Department of Conservation about the trees that were on DOC estate on the boundary of the farm and over looking the Waikato River. Ross wanted the trees removed to protect the boundary fence and remove the risk and danger to stock. DOC wanted the weed of their estate. CHHF wanted the pulpwood and the sawlogs that were produced. This second stage of the operation took place in March April of 1994 and was completed just as the rain started at the end of April.

In February of 1995 DOC approached me to look at harvesting further along the bluffs and through other neighbouring properties. Would I negotiate with the farmers to secure access and the removal of the wood. I then had to go back to John McAdam and discuss trucking through his property and the building skid sites in his paddocks. He was quite agreeable to the harvesting of his trees as the inclusion of the DOC trees meant much more income even with the disruption to the farming activities, fence lines and grass destruction. However this was an operation that would have to be done in the summer due to the extent of fence that would be down, and tracks that would be cut through the farm paddocks. He was willing to talk and look at the possibilities, provided there was compensation for the use of access. Plus he did not bear any of the costs of resorting his property back to a useable state. With this in mind it was time to start looking at volumes and budgets.

At this stage DOC included a piece at the other end of the bluffs from Okama Road. The access was through John de Haas's property. John had a sharemilker on the

farm and worked as a millhand at a small sawmill in Morrinsville.

Being so close to Kinleith Forest I was able to obtain some aerial photography from the our history files and tried to plot the area that would be harvested. The length of the stand on McAdams' property was easy. But it soon became apparent I needed to revisit the site with a prospective contractor to find out how far down the hill he could reach therefore defining the width of the logable stand. After some artistic juggling and thumb measuring we came up with a volume of 2500 tonnes with reasonable volume of Quality wood.

The boundary fence ran the length of the stand and would need to be replaced right through. There was no pressure on this fence from stock as the DOC side was all fern and bracken and no feed to entice animals through. So the need to replace the fence was due to the harvesting operation and, therefore, the trees should pay for the replacement. The recovery of the farmers paddocks was also a part of the operation of extracting the DOC trees.

On the de Haas property there was uphill trucking and a stream crossing to contend with. The stream, Okama Stream, had a bridge about 12 m in length and could easily stand light traffic, motor bikes and utes, but with only one person in. For some reason my passengers wouldn't get back in after they were given the opportunity to inspect the bridge until the ute was on the other side. This bridge could not be reinforced without major cost and the access out the other way was not a trucking option; too steep and a tight corner that a truck unit wouldn't get around loaded, even without a trailer. After doing some costing with our Forest Engineering Department it was decided that a temporary bridge could be constructed over top, and the old bridge would remain after the job was completed.

The DOC representative was informed of the farmer's demands so that he was aware of the costs involved with harvesting and trucking this wood. This presented no problem and he recommended that the budget be drawn up and send them a estimate of volume and stumpage returns. With this done, and an agreement signed up with DOC, and letters exchanged with the farmer about conditions and consideration for access, it was time to apply for the Resource Consent. The drawing up of the logging plan was a confirmation of the planning that had been done with the farmer and the contractor during the three visits to the site and then the Forest Engineering Planners had to visit the site to confirm the plan on the ground prior to posting it off to the Regional Council. When the RC finally arrived it was late March, and Autumn was well on the way with some wet days and very little drying. It was decided to hold the logging until the following summer and start in the early spring.

The operation was finally started in October 1995. The Logging Crew was selected by the Harvesting Department. Consideration was given to past experience in woodlots, size of machine (D85 Komatsu and 745 Fait Allis), safety record and the ability to adapt to difficult harvesting conditions; plus the fact that I had already taken this particular contractor to assess the area and he had participated in the planning process. It was felt that the area would have some rainy periods and there would be no metal on the road so the contractor would need to have either alternative work or be able to work every fine day and discard wet days. Given that the tractor was large enough, the harvesting contractor was given the task of road construction and re-stabilising the skids sites and access tracks ready for grassing at the completion of each area.

The harvesting of McAdams was planned for October till Xmas and then about 15th January the de Haas end should be ready to start. This meant some co-ordination of the construction of the temporary bridge as it was going to cost \$2,500 a month in rental and a bridge not being used was going to be expensive. As January came there appeared to be more volume than initially estimated at McAdams and the crew were not going to be finished when the bridge was constructed. The contractor had a second D85 Komatsu and employed extra men, shifting the experienced men to the more difficult tasks in whichever crew, as the situation arose.

There was more involved in the construction of the de Haas road. Part of the access road through the farm was going to be 15% on an adverse grade. If metal was to be put on, it would have to be rolled in prior to trucking and taken away later or covered at the end to protect the cow hooves. It was decided to use pumice from a pit beside the cowshed, but in CHHF property. To construct the road a 39-tonne digger and a motor scraper were used. The digger shaped and bedded the road and put pipes in while the motor scraper spent 10 days carting pumice to pad the road. Once this job was done the bridge arrived and was constructed in 8 hours. They used the 30-tonne digger to swing it in place and test the carrying capacity.

Cliff Marshall from Atiamuri was the principal logging contractor and his foreman Bruce Ruddall ran the operation. Cliff's operation has Q-Base accreditation and runs an excellent harvest safety plan with a daily hazard ID programme. His quality performance has been very reasonable but difficult to assess as most stands he has worked in, in woodlots, have a 45-90% pulp content. Crew strength was generally 5 men but at Xmas time went up to 8 with an extra machine being bought in to pull some long distances.

In the McAdam end of the stand the tractor rope was taken as far down the bluff as possible and if the volume of wood was available (not hidden behind a bluff or rock outcrop) an extension was put on the winch rope to reach 150 m down the hill. The feller had a Stage 1 tree felling module and had been working difficult trees in woodlots for a number of years. This didn't prevent him from getting his saw jammed in a tree as it twisted off the stump on a steep slope. He had to let go of the saw to get out of the way and the 1-month old 066 Stihl rolled off the edge, 150 metres down the bluff, to be lost in the bracken. With two ownerships coming onto one skid site it was important that the loader driver was kept informed as to the ownership of each stem. McAdam's volume seemed to be very high in the first three weeks of production so we did a piece count. The volume against the number of stumps showed an average pieces size of 13.4 tonnes. This was checked against two actual truck loads and the sample proved that McAdam's trees were, in fact, that heavy; short but fat.

The harvesting at the de Haas end started on 20 January 1996. A large volume was readily available and in the first couple of days the crew produced approx 400 t/day in this old crop stand. Production soon dropped to 100 t/day as the steeper areas and small regeneration portions were the only bits left. To reach some of the timber a chainsaw winch was used, pulling the winch rope up the hill to the logs. The use of this winch meant the breaking out could be done with two men instead of four. With a D85 Komatsu on each job producing 100 t/day the Fiat 745 loader was able to work between both stands on a week-about basis. Well this was the plan until trucking arrived.

Rotorua Forest Haulage carted most of the volume but, in the early stages when stockpiles were high, some trucks were despatched from the Kinleith Weighbridge

to shift the extra loads. The McAdam block was all downhill hauling for the trucks, across dirt tracks and grass paddocks. This presented very few problems for the logging trucks but a close eye was kept on the weather and trucking stopped during the wet days. Trucks coming back for a load had no problems getting into the job with trailers up and we had no road maintenance problems until John McAdam needed to get his empty stock trucks up to the cattle yards, with four axle trailers being towed by empty trucks. A short section of road from the gate to the stock yards had gone powdery and soft. This became especially frustrating for John as most mornings the dew did not lift until 9.30 am, just after the trucks were due to arrive. This prompted us to fix the first part of the road from the gate to the cattle yards at a cost of \$5000. Metal (100 x 100 mm), grader, roller, and some fines on top give a surface that would allow John's wife to travel in and out without too much trouble in the family car (4 x 4 Toyota Surf).

Trucking at the Okama Road Block was a different story. The pumice, which was laid down for the road, was rolled in by the motor scraper but the track was still very steep. RFH put in one of their Central Tyre Flation trucks. On the first load he tipped the trailer over at 6.00 am. After righting the trailer he carted all day with no problems so RHF sent in another truck, an old Pacific with the sort of driver that comes out of the Native bush after six months only because the truck needs an oil change. This operator was good and the two trucks worked well together. The road was packing down well but, as the pumice dried, more care was needed to get up this 15% grade. Three days into the job and another driver arrived, weebix packet licence and the road was "stuffed". The loader had to run out from the skid site each load, for both the Pacific and this Kenworth, but the CTI truck still got out by itself. Tony Sargison then came down and tried to show the new man how to drive. The road had gone very powdery

on top with the dry weather and Tony came up with two options. Either I fix the road with metal or pay for their Terex Mocksie to 2-stage the wood to the top of the hill. This 2-tage idea seemed the better option as the bulk of the volume had already been shifted and fixing the road was going to involve several loads of metal with a grader and roller, with no guarantee that it would last the rest of the job. So RHF bought in the Mocksie plus another loader and the remaining volume was there to cart.

About this time the McAdam portion of the job was showing signs of some difficult up-hill trucking. One corner was quite steep and the ground soft. There weren't any options for lowering the grade without major earth works and cutting two fences, so the Mocksie was starting to come in very handy. It was able to carry about 20-tonne pay loads of short logs. The travel time out to the trucks was around a 20-minute round trip, and the Mocksie could keep plenty of wood available for three trucks most days. Twice the Mocksie unloaded in the paddock on the way out. The back wheels drops into a hole that the operator didn't notice and the back portion of the vehicle tips over. The pivot in the steering mid-section allows the front half to remain upright so little damage was caused, except to the driver's reputations.

John McAdam was always going to be hard to please while we were working his farm. His attitude to getting everything his own way strained the relationship several times. Some periods of torrential rain caused scouring on his paddocks where we had removed the grass for truck access, and he demanded a machine in to fix these few holes immediately. A couple of gates got nudged by the trucks. One truckie made a point of apologising to John, while the other didn't recall breaking a No 1 strainer and the 14 ft steel gate that was attached. John asked a loader driver to load quietly when they doing some night shift, because they were

close to the house and his children were trying to sleep. The loader driver gave John the impression that his parents weren't married. Right from the start John put pressure on to fix every minor fault in the road or patch of grass that was disturbed. Eventually I had to put it to him that it may not look good right now but it will when we have finished. However the metal that had been washed off the road into his paddock, by heavy rain, was now his and he could do what he liked with it. As you can see, not all of the problems came from one side and at the end of the job John "shouted" a few beers at the Atiamuri Tavern with the whole logging crew and an invitation was extended to the roading supervisor who graded the roads and fixed a number of blocked culverts at the end of the job.

John de Haas did not have the same disturbance on his farm and therefore less to cause problems. As always fencing was an issue. John said he would pull the fences down but was not always available. The sharemilker was not willing to do this work on John's behalf and the logging crew didn't want to be bothered with removing lengths of fence by hand. This meant that about 150 m of fence was removed by tractor blade and CHHF picked up the tab for the lost material.

Did we get it right? In many instances we did get the wood out and off to the mill. We did finish all the available area on McAdam's farm and he received considerable compensation for access, plus the royalty from his own wood which turned out to be 1000 tonnes and not the original 450 quoted. The new fence was erected and the fencer only rolled his ute once. DOC had a large income and considerable volume of the so-called weed removed from their estate and, if you are the public driving along Ongaroto Road on the north side of the Waikato River, you can hardly see where that volume came from.

But there is still some volume there to be harvested. The weather drove us out before we could finish harvesting the de Haas end of the DOC stand and there are a number of trees on the de Haas property which will be harvested this year. Approximately 600 tonnes of old crop wood has been left because it can't be logged without putting a large volume of soil into an intermittent waterway which would, no doubt, end up in the Waikato River. There are a number of trees that were too difficult to fell away from the stream and the tractor could not be placed close enough to pull them back. These trees are still standing like the little black hair that grows out of a mole, and they irritate me. The large volume of trees that are unreachable from the top of the bluffs are also unreachable from the bottom. It is too dangerous to expect a man to fell these trees and a hauler operation would be too expensive to extract the wood. Is it right that we should leave this hill with a halo of trees just above its ears and nothing on top?

The next step is already taking shape. There is a helicopter pilot who is starting to talk reasonable haul rates for heli-logging. This opens up some possibilities if the Helicopter operators are prepared to be reasonable and set competitive rates. They could find that a lower rate means more work, which means more turnover.

But is this the real answer?

Steve Harvey
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MERCHANTABLE ROUNDWOOD GRADES				
Log Grades	Estimated de Haas	Estimated McAdam	Estimated McAdam	Actual
AO	500	250	60	770.00
FS	300	150	0	350.00
JS	300	0	0	516.38
JAA	600	350	0	338.00
HD, HDD	2,400	1,800	400	10,188.18
Total tonnes	4,100	2,550	460	12,162.56
TOTAL ESTIMATE =	7,110		ACTUAL =	12,162.56