
CARDRONA VALLEY: ENVIRONMENTAL HARMONY AND COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

Cardrona Valley is 40 km long, running in a north/east, south/west direction. It is 30,000 hectares in area, with a native plant cover of silver tussock and matagouri, running into blue tussock and snow grass as you ascend the valley sides. Annual rainfall averages 600 mm on the valley floor, and altitude increases from 300 metres at the north/east end to 1100 metres at the south/west. The mountain peaks along the valley sides reach an altitude of 1900 metres. Cardrona is a valley that normally has long, hot, dry summers and in winter the snow line is down to 900 metres. Several snow falls cover the whole valley, but remains only a few days on the valley floor.

Cardrona is a pleasant valley, sheltered from the prevailing winds by its aspect. It has no geographical features that are unique, and nor do the plant species lack cousins throughout Central Otago. Man's activities have impacted on the valley in many ways over the years and yet it has lost none of its appeal. It is as well clad as it ever was, and we are given the past's fascinating rich history to build on into the future.

HISTORY

Cardrona Valley has known a **colourful** history which began with the gold rush days in the 1860s. The population rose to 3000, a town was surveyed and constructed with eight hotels and six stores; it was all go in Cardrona. As time went by and the gold became more difficult to extract, dredging and other **mechanised** methods were used. Six dredges worked in the Cardrona Valley, and along with all the sluicing and mining activities the surgery on the valley was of major proportions. Nature has covered these scars to the point where it comes as a surprise to people of today, when told that mining was a major activity in the valley. The impact of the mining, though great at the time, has been short lived.

Gold bearing land able to be worked by these methods was soon exhausted and the miners were faced with the prospect of having to leave the valley to find work. They formed one, and then a second committee to endeavour to create work so that they could remain in the Valley, but to no avail and most had to leave.

Sheep were run in the Valley by the Pisa Station near Cromwell, which was purchased by the Government in 1920 and sub-divided for returned servicemen in 1922. There had been a happy relationship between run-holders and miners, with the sheep from Pisa Station running on the miner's commonage of 3000 hectares and the miner's cattle running in the gullies of the commonage and Pisa Station. The commonage was sub-divided between the remaining mining families, so that farming and rabbiting along with a little gold-mining became the main occupations in the Valley. Twenty odd rabbiters provided plenty of **labour** for shearing and haymaking on the fourteen farms, which subsequently amalgamated down to seven farms by the **1970s**, by which time the rabbiters had also left. The school bus was terminated, the two day a week mail service was under threat of closure and the valley road was being down-graded. The economic future was bleak for the remaining 21 people.

THE PRESENT

The Cardrona Ski Area was a dream of mine born out of a desire to resolve this problem; the same problem that the miners faced — the decline in the local community. Fortunately advances in technology enabled me to look upon the greatest natural liability my father faced, snow, and utilize it to provide the jobs so desperately needed to breath life back into the Valley. Two to three million dollars of income generated this year, and jobs for 130 staff are benefits this snow farming dream has brought Cardrona. A school bus, five day week mail service, new houses and the hope to farmers that at least the essential community services are assured — this is skiing's contribution to the Valley. Out of every eight dollars spent by the skier, seven dollars are spent off the **skifield** resulting in millions of dollars for the winter tourist industry in the wider region.

The ski area's success has brought further pressures; pressures for staff accommodation and pressures for skier accommodation near to the ski area, in lodges both private and commercial. Our response to these people pressures has been to bring in technical experts to investigate the possibilities. This has resulted in a proposal going before the Lake County for a Rural Alpine Village, and permission has now been received to apply for a change of land zoning.

I have an application for a cross-country ski area on the Pisa Range, approved by the Land Board but with conditions so restrictive that they threaten the economic viability of the venture. When these problems are resolved, and I have no doubt they will be, the Cardrona Valley has the basis for a successful future.

Drawing up the plans for the Village required us to achieve harmony with the environment, for we knew the Valley's atmosphere was the key to success. Unlike the miners and farmers before us, for whom preserving the natural atmosphere of the Valley was not required for the success of their product, we were confronted with the challenge of a product which would be worthless unless harmony with nature was preserved.

THE FUTURE

When I look to the future, I see communities like the proposed Cardrona Rural Village being important to the Country's economy. Local workers from both farms and tourist businesses need somewhere to live. Extra houses on farms are additional capital liability, and have only a fixed use. I see farm staff living in these villages, handy to work but not losing their home if they change jobs. Ours, being a tourist valley has exciting opportunities. We have to continue to follow the path that I have followed **with** the Cardrona Ski Area; define your product, analyse your market and be sure you are aware of it's requirements — not what you think they want, but rather what the market will buy. Having established what the market requires, marrying that requirement to your product is an exercise needing total honesty. Once this basic exercise has been completed and the result a positive one, moving on to the correct presentation of the product is crucial, because unless it is well done, all is at risk.

The market identified for the Cardrona Rural Village is not large in terms of the international tourist market of today, but quite large in New Zealand terms. This market desires release from the motor car, suburbia and **industrialisation**. The village will have areas of pastoral land spread throughout, in order to prevent it becoming a surban transplant. No industrial or retail complexes are planned, since they would also defeat the attractiveness of the product. During winter, the village guests would have skiing at Cardrona or Pisa within minutes, and the village will be centrally located between the other three ski areas for a day trip to them. Tarsealing of highway 89 is to start this coming summer, and we see completion of this as a necessity for the success of these products.

In summer the guests and residents will have a peaceful, restful place with plenty of easy, gentle walks and an aura of tranquility. Wanaka, 20 minutes away, and Queenstown only forty minutes away, will provide the commercial tourist activities if people want to do something different.

The Cardrona Valley has its own atmosphere, in part created by the gentle colour tones of the Valley on the background of the restful browns of the native tussock and fine grasses. The intrusion of briar, broom and gorse are the threat to this picture, and are a menace to the original harmony of the valley. The natural beauty that we hold dear survived the miners' days, but will be destroyed by this invasion.

The conservation danger facing rural New Zealand today is not development, but neglect. Man has impacted on this land and huge changes have been made to develop our farming industry. We have struggled to achieve a balance and tremendous amounts of money and time have been spent during the last thirty years in an endeavour to achieve this. The Otago Catchment Board and the Lands & Survey Department are to be congratulated for their sensible co-operative approach, and for the balance achieved. We must not neglect the land now, or all that has been gained will be lost, and the efforts of recent generations callously discarded.

Throughout the world, the balance between nature and man remains the critical factor. Environmental problems can now be created not only by too many people, but also by too few. Man living in an area is part of the pattern; remove him and many facets he was controlling will then deteriorate through lack of stewardship. Too few people removes local care and one cannot escape this need even if only on economic grounds. Tourists come to see our countryside but to travel along roads lined by broom and gorse is not going to hold much appeal for the international or even local tourist. The take-over of much of our mountain lands by these bushes will remove the grasses that cover this land, changing the water run-off patterns and freedom of movement of larger animals and man across the land.

Cardrona Valley, year 2000, will have a village of several hundred people. The economic base of the Valley will be tourism. Just as mining and farming had their impact on the land, so too will tourism. The impact will be small compared with farming and minute compared with gold-mining. The trivial effect upon the environment is a small price to pay for the large numbers of jobs created, and for the emotional and recreational enjoyment of thousands throughout the year.

The wonderful climate, environment and atmosphere will be a great attraction; a sealed road to Wanaka and Queenstown will bring a wide range of summer activities within easy reach, while the winter snow makes the Valley a skier's paradise.

Cardrona's second product would be farm produce — meat, wool and skins. I see the Cardrona Valley potentially producing meats of unique appeal to the tourist market. Last year a West German bought merinos from our high country, but with a condition that they must not have been grazing English grasses for three weeks prior to killing, and that they be mature animals of a good size; this meat sells to Germany at \$12.50 per kilo! Here once again tourism can work in harmony with this environment. We cannot produce a good sized sheep in overstocked conditions. Noxious animal control would be aided by the catching of wild opossum, rabbit, hare, deer and goat, for sale to restaurants in the region. The 70 restaurants now operating will have grown in number to two or three hundred by the year 2000, these game meats will enable the region to offer the international tourist a range of meats that would delight any gourmet's palate. I can see a small abattoir killing and/or processing these animals for domestic trade, since this would not be subject to the politically motivated hygiene controls that are now affecting our export meat industry. I was interested to learn from an Otago Medical School pathologist that the

last documented episode of food poisoning caused by contamination during the killing operation, was in Germany in 1923.

Our greatest asset for the future may thus not be the English **clovers** and grasses, but instead the native grasses that they have replaced in our betterlands. It may be in the year 2000, that the Cardrona Valley's class VI, VII & **VIII** land will be capable of producing more dollars per square hectare from pastoral use, than our class II & III land!

With overproduction of meat in the world, the consumer is looking for quality, interesting foods. Here is a gourmet's delight. Alternatively, the withdrawal of controlled grazing will lead to a **vacuum** into which will move rabbits, hares, wild pigs, goats and deer, which have no respect for the controlled seasonal grazing needed to protect and conserve the resource. We must continue to manage this land, not neglect it.

The promise of these present and future developments will only be realised if we see more enlightened policies flowing from central government. Rigid centralised policies which ignore the great variations in the needs of the local natural and human environments will only slow or totally prevent the achievements of these goals. The **successful** completion of the Cardrona Ski Area and the smooth progress toward the Cardrona Rural Village are examples of projects on private freehold land, with public control in the hands of local bodies who are able to relate these projects to the needs of the particular community and region.

The effective use and conservation of crown lands requires that greater consideration be given to these variations in local human and natural environments. Although New Zealand is a small landmass, these variations in topography, temperature and precipitation are quite striking. Plants and animals all have their favoured temperature and rainfall levels where their health and growth are maximum. It is widely **recognised** that the rabbit is only a real problem below 500 mm annual rainfall; above that he tends to stabilise in colonies and thus an economic balance with farming can result. What a pity nature's variations were not considered when the Rabbit Boards were formed.

Rigid centralised policies which assume that local people neither understand nor care about their own environment have no rational place and are indeed the greatest danger our lands face. Local care, working within a flexible national policy, is needed if we are not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Just as I have turned snow, my fathers greatest liability, into an asset, others may turn today's liabilities into their future assets. During Cardrona Ski Area's early years a couple of friends were the only people who did not consider that I was pursuing just a foolish dream. Policies must both allow and encourage new ventures; one mans foolishness is another mans vision. Three decades ago New Zealand had a world rating in living standards of third, Today we are 23rd. To reverse this slide we must go into the future positively with the emphasis on flexible national policies, allowing people in the different regions to develop according to geographical environment, and the local **community's** perceptions..

I intend to work toward the Cardrona Valley's great future. The wonderful requirement for the commercial success of all these developments is that they rely upon the preservation of the environmental harmony of this valley. I see the Cardrona Valley in the year 2000 providing a large number of fulfilling jobs, giving emotional and recreational enjoyment to thousands of people, and yet remaining the place I love and where I will always be proud to live.