

Stone Wall

Waipuna Farm, Pahiatua Track, R D 1, Palmerston North

NZHPT Registration Number: 7118
NZHPT Status: Historic Place: Category II
NZHPT Registration Date: 17/12/93
City/District Council: Palmerston North City Council
District Plan Status: Category 2

Other Names: Dry Stone Wall



Brief History

In 1919, after returning from service in World War I, Alfred Oswald Meyrick purchased a farm of 164 hectares on the Pahiatua Track. (Section 10 and 11, Block XIX). About 1922, he built a dry stone wall, approximately one metre high and two hundred metres in length, with rocks collected from around the property in order to create a paddock to enclose sheep, provide shelter and clear the land of rocks. It follows a curving line down a very steep incline from a high point on the property and can be seen in the distance from near the summit of the Pahiatua Track.

The wall is constructed in the traditional British fashion of agricultural fencing from Scotland/Yorkshire, with larger rocks at the base grading up to smaller rocks along the top. No mortar is used to hold rocks together. A cairn (stone landmark) was constructed in a similar fashion upon a nearby outcrop.

The Manawatu does not have a great stoneworking tradition, being mostly of sand or swamp country, and the nearest other stone wall is thought to be in Otaki, built during the Great Depression using alluvial boulders. It has been speculated that Meyrick's decision to use the stones was influenced by the economic recession of the early 1920s, which resulted in slower business and more free time. Erle Crawford, a friend and neighbour of Meyrick recorded that he was also involved in the construction.

When Meyrick retired from farming in 1958, the land was purchased by Richard Harrison and, on his retirement, by his son Ralph. Ralph Harrison has stated that part of the dry stone wall was built during Meyrick's ownership and the cairn and the higher part of the wall including a small sheep yard was built later by his father and himself. They continued the wall because it was impossible to dig postholes in the rocky outcrop and the paddocks needed clearing.

Robin and Dawn Whiteman subsequently owned the farm until its purchase by Bucknell Holdings. Martin Cox, director of Bucknell Holdings, became interested in the origin of the wall and eager for its preservation. Designed to restrain sheep, the wall was vulnerable to damage caused by the cattle now being run in the paddocks. There was an unexplained gap in the wall and Cox had it filled by a local person skilled in the tradition. Cox applied to the New Zealand Historic Places Trust for a grant to build a fence on both sides of the wall to prevent damage by cattle. The following year, 1993, the wall was classified Category II as meriting preservation for its architectural quality, and the grant was then approved. Soon after, the farm was bought by Mr and Mrs DA Staples who expressed a positive interest in continuing with the preservation project. The property has since been sold and subdivided but the wall remains in good condition.

Principal Sources:

Ian Matheson City Archives, file number A175/199.

Manawatu Regional Branch Historic Places Trust Record 010133.

PNCC files, HP file number 12012-07.