Mt Nicholas Station – traditional high country merino station

JACK COCKS, KATE COCKS
Mt Nicolas Station, Mt Nicholas Bay Road, Lake Wakatipu

History
- Farmed since 1856, oldest and largest station on Lake Wakatipu
- Three owners last 100 years
- Located on the western shores of Lake Wakatipu
- 30 minute boat ride to Queenstown, 1.5 hour drive to Te Anau

Land classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land class</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Management</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40,000 ha</td>
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<td>34,000 ha native tussock</td>
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<tr>
<td>5,650 ha oversown</td>
<td>950 ha low altitude hill country: 300–500m above sea level (asl) (lambing, young cattle, hoggets)</td>
<td>Running 6–8 SU/ha 250kg Sulphur (S) super20 and 350kg lime biannually</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,150 ha mid altitude hill country: 500–650m asl (lambing and hogget wintering)</td>
<td>Running 6 SU/ha 200kg S super20 biannually</td>
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<td>2,600 ha high altitude hill country: 650–1,000m asl (cows, ewes wintering)</td>
<td>Running 4–5 SU/ha 125kg S super20 biannually</td>
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<td>550 ha wether wintering hill country: 800–1,000m asl (summer ewes, winter wethers)</td>
<td>Running 3–4 SU/ha 125kg S super20 every four years</td>
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<td>400ha cultivated</td>
<td>200ha on the station 200ha finishing unit at Te Anau</td>
<td>Running 10 SU/ha 200kg super10 and 400kg/ha lime every year</td>
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Stock numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stock category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>80:20 wool:meat income split – opposite of crossbreds</td>
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<tr>
<td>9,400 in-lamb ewes – 85% lambing</td>
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<td>2,600 dry 2T ewes (due to lack of lambing country and risk of footrot to grow out)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9,500 wethers</td>
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<tr>
<td>7,500 hoggets – 3,000 ewes, 2,500 wethers, 2,000 culls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>900 cows and in calf heifers – 90% calving</td>
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<tr>
<td>400 R2 steers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>200 R2 dry heifers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>800 calves</td>
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Unique challenges farming in our area

- 1,000ml rainfall, 300–2,000m asl,
- Rainfall high for merinos – parasites, feet
- Altitude/rainfall – snow risk
- Variable climate like everywhere. But less able to feed supplements, alter stock numbers. Coupled with low staff=conservative policies
- Isolated – freight, power, food, schooling

Key benefits of farming in our area

- Reliable rainfall (????)
- Lake effect on pasture growth
- Able to farm with limited supplements
- The high country – allows us to build autumn saved pasture
- Lifestyle, other opportunities
- We live in the best place in the world!

What are we doing/running?

- Very unique, like all high country stations
- Try to be self sufficient. Hydro, supply food to all our staff, very limited machinery contractors
- New Zealand Merino Company – key partner
- Icebreaker, Silere contracts
- Staff: Kate and me, head shepherd and cook, two young shepherds, Robert semi-retired
- Small tourism business with three staff
  - Events, hunting, accommodation

Basic philosophies

- Family first
- Try and have all our stock good all the time
- Simple, basics, traditional, planning
- Simple system allows one couple to run it

How do we stack up relative to similar farm types?

- Bigger area, stock numbers, higher stocking rate than most merino farmers
- Simpler policies but more stock classes
- More stock units per staff member
- Wetter, usually longer growing season (lake effect)
• More traditional – wethers, use horses a lot, limited supplementary feed
• Similar production for sheep. Cattle better
• Comparison with New Zealand Merino (NZM) stats
• Lower cost, lower income, similar profit, more resilient (hopefully)

What are we doing differently to take advantage of the challenges/benefits of here?

• Take a long-term view with family first
• Keep everything as simple as possible – ‘We're traditional high country farmers growing wool’
• Low cost policies, low staff numbers
• Manipulate feed demand. Timing of stock into high country, steers, wethers, sale stock, finishing farm, large % of dry stock (60%)
• Utilise high country where possible

How have we modified our farming practice to fit in with the environment?

• Flexible stock classes – steers, wethers, calve heifers as three year olds, mate ewes as four-tooth’s
• Te Anau block – flexibility
• Utilise the high country where possible
• Minimise environmental impact with low stocking rate, limited tracks, weed control
• Big blocks, simple management

Where do vets fit in for us?

• Technical advice – abortions, minerals etc
• Physical jobs – pregnancy testing, de-horning etc

Summary

• Family first
• Long-term view
• Do the basics well
• Simple, traditional high country station
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