

THE STORY OF THE BLOCK OF CROWN LAND AT WANIGELA KNOWN AS "UTAN"

In 1929 Mr W. R. Humphries, who was then R.M. at Tufi, visited Wanigela to acquire the "Utan" land. He encountered great difficulty in establishing ownership to the land, for the reason that the people of the Wanigela group of villages were afraid to venture even a mile or two inland from the coast for fear of the Middle Musa people whom they referred to as the "DORIRI". These people were in the habit of roaming along the foot-hills between Kewansasap and Wanigela and would spear or club to death any individual coastal people they found in their travels. This of course was by way of "pay-back" for death that had occurred in the Doriri villages. At any rate the Wanigelas were so terrified of the Doriris that they seldom even ventured as far inland as the Utan land and those that claimed ownership to this land said they had never visited it and that it was known as the home of the spirits of their forefathers, and that at times on moon-light nights village people often heard a hunting party of spirits calling out to one another during a hunt and also heard dogs barking.

Eventually after a lot of delay ownership to the Utan land was established and Mr Humphries went ahead and surveyed the boundaries. In this work he was considerably hindered by the owners who wanted to lead him here, there and everywhere, so that the block would have resembled a jig-saw puzzle. Eventually the boundaries of a cohesive block of about 19000 acres was established and then came the question of payment, which presented a considerable stumbling block. In fact the main difficulty Mr Humphries had to overcome was the unwillingness of the Wanigela people to part with their land - they did not want Europeans (or foreigners as they called them) to settle on their land (other than the Anglican Mission whom they regarded as their friends). The Wanigela people still do not want Europeans. Mr Humphries according to his report had to exert considerable pressure on the owners before they decided to sell the land to the Administration. This obstacle was eventually overcome and a total of 19,000 odd acres became Crown Land.

A local Company known as Sugarlands Ltd, had taken up various leases of Crown Land in the Northern and Tufi District which included 10,000 acres at Sangara, about 10,000 acres at Kewansasap, 15,000 acres at Sinapa and 19,000 acres at Wanigela (the Utan area).

Mr Humphries was offered the position as General Manager of this company. He also offered me an executive position in the company. A pilot plot of sugar was established at Sinapa about 1/2 a mile from the coast, and a crop of sugar was grown which gave a very high yield of sugar per ton of cane.

However, at this time, the 1929-30 depression was having its full effect and the world price of sugar dropped to 3d per lb. As this was the estimate price of production of sugar grown at ~~Wanig~~ Wanigela and on other areas of Crown Land in the N.D. and Tufi district the whole sugar growing project fell through and the leases were forfeited.

Then at the outbreak of World War II, the * Sangara, Kewansasap, Sinapa and Wanigela areas of Crown Land were taken up by the British Pulp & Paper Co. Ltd. Their idea was to produce paper pulp suitable for making high grade writing paper from 'kuru-kuru' grass. Samples of paper pulp made from 'kuru-kuru' (grown on the Wanigela Crown Land) produced a high quality paper equal to that made from Spanish Esparto grass, which produced the world's best quality writing papers.

The British Pulp & Paper Co. tried unsuccessfully to get permission from the Capital Issues Board at Canberra to raise the necessary capital to float the company in Australia. However, the necessary permission was not granted, as it was not considered essential to the war effort.

Some of the Directors of the B.P. & P. Co. had approached me in 1941 (I was then National Service Officer at Tamworth in N.S.W.) and offered me the position as General Manager of the company if they succeeded in getting permission from the Capital Issues Board, Canberra, to raise the necessary capital. However, I had doubts about the feasibility of being able to harvest 'kuru-kuru' as a crop without eradicating it, and suggested that the ~~company~~ company concentrate on planting rubber and other economic crops. Nothing came of my suggestion and after paying the lease rent on the leases for about six years they were eventually forfeited.

The next people to appear on the scene as far as the Utan land was concerned was the Kingsford-Smith Syndicate, comprising about six men who each subscribed £2,000 to grow rubber and cocoa at Utan. The story of their failure and lack of experience is a sad one. None of the members of the syndicate had had any previous experience in the tropics or of tropical agriculture. They took up the area at present held by the United Church, but due to lack of experience, mis-management and friction the venture was a failure and one by one the members of the syndicate left, leaving only Kingsford Smith in possession. ~~He~~ Eventually he disposed of it to the Harmac Group, who appointed Mr. Moody (one of the members of the Kingsford Smith Syndicate) to manage the property.

His lack of experience and mis-management soon got the new owners into financial difficulties, in addition to their other financial failures, and as the ANZ Bank held a mortgage on the property, when the Harmac Group could no longer carry on, the Bank resumed control of the property. The Bank, however, was not anxious to have a non-productive plantation on their hands, and eventually Utan was taken over by Mr. Cedric Siebel together with the mortgage. If I remember rightly, Mr. Siebel paid £3,000 cash and took over a £6,000 or £7,000 mortgage from the A.N.Z. Bank.

Mr Siebel owing to lack of finance and ability also got into financial difficulties with the property, and was anxious to dispose of it provided he could clear himself.

Eventually the United Church acquired the property from Mr. Siebel.

John Beasley attributes this to Mr Cridland

10/6/75

Sometime after 1958 Mr Alistair Imlay managed the plantation and planted the rubber.

Plantation abandoned mid 1961.

28.2.63 Taken over by Cedric Siebel for nearly 5 years.

during 1968 Purchased by the United Church and manager's house built.

Managers during the first years - Peter Lawrie, Don Middleton, Ken Wise

22.11.71 Manager E. (Ted) Whitaker (18 months)
 mid 73 Colin Wingrave (15 months) left 19.11.74
 Feb. 75 W.A. (Mac) MacGregor. (3 years)

~~March~~

March 78

David Buchan.
 Assistant - Mechanic, Arend Tibben came Aug. 79.