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# CROSBIES SETTLEMENT, COROMANDEL RANGES

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*When Tom and Elizabeth took the farm  
The bracken made their bed.  
And quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle  
The magpies said.*

...  
*The farm's still there. Mortgage corporations  
Couldn't give it away.  
And quardle oodle ardle wardle doodle  
The magpies say.*

Denis Glover, *The Magpies*

## Introduction

Crosbies Settlement is a farm settlement that was established in the Coromandel Ranges in 1880 and abandoned as a place of residence in 1926. The area was farmed sporadically until about 1970 when most of it was subsumed into the Coromandel Forest Park. The area that was cleared for farming stretches about 5 km along the main ridge of the Coromandel Range, approximately 12 km north east of Thames. Although it is well known to residents of the Thames area, it was not surveyed, nor recorded in the NZAA site recording scheme, until October 2006. It is now recorded as T12/1010.

The site can be reached via several different tramping tracks; start points including Karaka, Waiotahi, Tararu, Te Puru, Waiomu, Tapu Hill and Kauaeranga Valley (from Booms Flat, Wainora or Whangaiterenga camping grounds). The site is named extensively on track information boards and maps, although the historical significance is not made apparent.

The remoteness of the site and difficulty of access (no vehicular access; foot access requiring a round trip of about eight hours) greatly contributed to the demise of the settlement, and probably contributed to the lack of an NZAA site record until very recently. Another difficulty encountered in completing



*Figure 1. General location map (Crosbies Settlement is represented by the black dot, north east of Thames).*

the survey was the heavy re-growth, estimated at over 90% from the oldest air photos that have been located, which were taken in 1944.

## History

Crosbies Settlement is part of a land block known as the Waikawau block. This was acquired by the Crown in 1872 from its previous owners, Ngati Tamatera, under somewhat controversial circumstances, and is still subject to a Treaty of Waitangi claim (Waitangi Tribunal document WAI 418 B1 2002). From 1864 Crown land purchaser James Mackay had been steadily acquiring land in the Hauraki area for the Crown, mainly to facilitate the opening and development of the Coromandel goldfields. Mackay commonly used a rather dubious method: “He supplied Maoris with food and much money ... The Maoris called it ‘raihana’, after the rations of the army in Maori war times... The advances were all noted as being against miners right fees when the field was opened” (Isdale 1967: 38). This practice involved the extension of credit to individuals known to share the ownership of Maori land, to allow them to

purchase goods or supplies, using the land as security. When the total had built up to a substantial amount, iwi were confronted with the amount of their “debt” and pressured into settling it. This usually involved selling the relevant block of land (normally at rates favourable to the Crown).

The *raihana* practice was considered unfair, even among the European press and colonial hierarchy, and was officially stopped in late 1875 following a parliamentary inquiry (Monin 2001: 238). In the case of the Waikawau block, there was even more controversy, as a large amount of credit was extended to Ngati Tamatera to purchase supplies for the tangi of two important chiefs, Taraia Ngakuti and Paora Te Putu. There were other issues which arose later relating to the Crown acquisition of portions of the Waikawau block which had been reserved for Ngati Tamatera benefit, but these are not relevant to the history of Crosbies Settlement. These included some wahi tapu sites.

In 1880 part of the Waikawau Block was surveyed and subdivided into five farms, each of approximately three hundred acres. These were allocated under the Homestead Act.<sup>1</sup> The five original owners were: Thomas H. Crosbie (block later sold to the Lyes family), James Patterson (block almost immediately sold to Arthur Repton),<sup>2</sup> Hugh Mackie (later sold to Charles Boxall),<sup>2</sup> William Crispe (later sold to Robert Clyde) and C.D. (Charles) Wright (Isdale n.d.: 26). The block containing the area more recently known as The Pines (so named because of the prominent pine shelter belts, see Figures 7 and 8) was in the name of Thomas Crosbie. Another block immediately to the south east was later sold to Janet Grey, daughter of Thomas Crosbie. Only a few of these blocks were cleared or utilised to any extent, and most had absentee owners (Clover 2004: 760; Sutton 2006). The Crosbie block was the only one with significant owner-occupation, leading to the popular name of Crosbies Settlement.

Early European history of Crosbies Settlement was provided by Mike Saunders, a long-time resident of Thames and great grandson of Thomas Crosbie (Saunders 2002, 2006). Thomas Hunter Crosbie was born in Scotland in 1840 and emigrated to NZ, arriving in Auckland on 1 December 1863 on the *Green Jacket*. He married after arrival in New Zealand and had seven children, including son Jim.

The Crosbie family gradually cleared land for farming and supplemented their lifestyle by collecting kauri gum, which the Coromandel had in abundance. The gum was transported to Thames by pack horse where it was sold to traders, who came mainly from Auckland by ship. The Thames

1 The Homestead Act was designed to allocate land (often marginal blocks, regarded as wasteland) to prospective settlers. Provided the settlers carried out a certain amount of development and met other conditions, the titles became freehold

2 “Rackton” and “Vauxhall” according to Clover (2006)

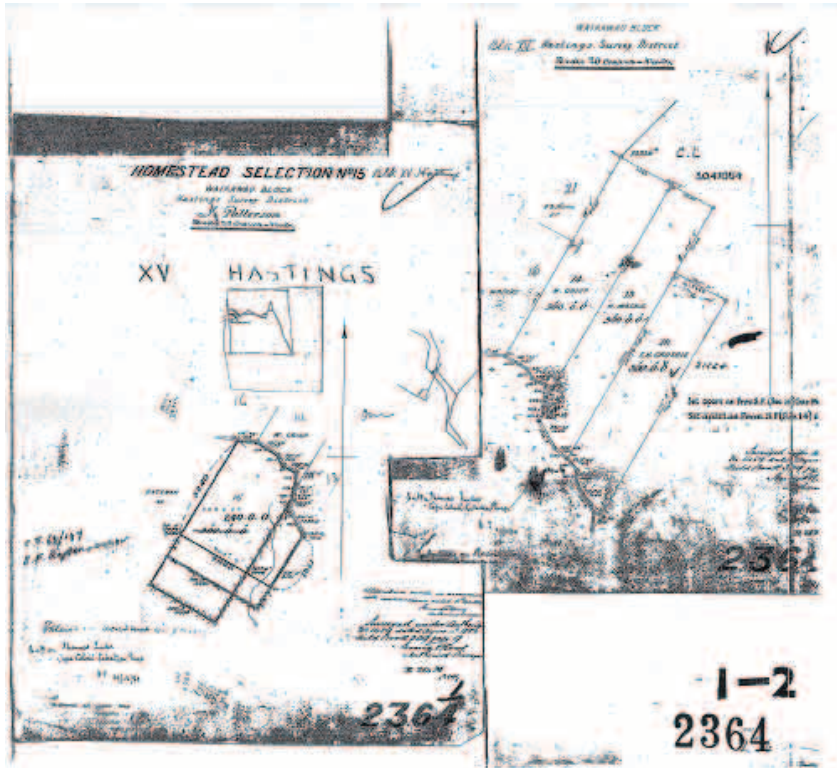


Figure 2. Survey map of Crosbies Settlement area, dated 1880. Note: Hastings was the European name for the small coastal town now known as Tapu.

goldfield opened in 1867 and, virtually overnight, Thames became a thriving town. Jim Crosbie eventually moved to Thames and became foreman of the Sylvia mine, which was one of the highest producing mines in the Thames goldfield (Nolan 1977: 24). He had a family of eight children, one of whom was Ruby Saunders, Mike Saunders' mother (Saunders 2002).

According to Mike Saunders (2002), "as a young boy I used to see Jim Crosbie almost every weekend and he would spend many hours sitting on the back porch of his home telling stories about his friends, a large percentage of whom were Maori, and how they would hunt for food and live off the land."

Some interesting events that occurred during the Crosbie family occupation were as follows. In August 1886 Thomas Crosbie "tried to attract prospectors to find gold, offering half his four-roomed house for their accommodation. 'I know gold-bearing quartz exists in the vicinity of my farm'"



*Figure 3. Crosbies Settlement homestead, date unknown, but probably before the farm was sold to the Lyes family in 1917.*

(Isdale n.d.: 38). On 29 May 1902, Mrs Agnes Crosbie suffered a thigh injury caused by falling over a log and had to be manually carried out by stretcher to the Thames hospital (Isdale n.d.: 110). On 28 July 1905, the Crosbie homestead was destroyed by fire.<sup>3</sup> “It was thought fortunate that the gum store was not destroyed, the gum being worth something, while the 5 or 6 roomed house and contents were not believed to be insured” (Isdale n.d.: 121).

In 1917, the Crosbie family sold The Pines block to Joshua and Elizabeth Lyes, who also leased the block to the south east from Janet Grey. Information on the next phase of Crosbies Settlement history was provided by Joshua and Elizabeth’s daughter, Madge Sutton (nee Lyes) (Clover 2004) and her son Ray Sutton (Sutton 2006).

Joshua Lyes was a Thames miner who contracted miners’ lung disease and was advised to live at a higher altitude, so the family purchased, and moved to, the Crosbie farm. Madge Lyes did not move to Crosbies initially, but did so about a year after her father. She lived at Crosbies from age 11 until “about 19” (Clover 2004: 673) and undertook school lessons there by correspondence.

The Lyes family lived by farming and gardening, and selling surplus produce in Thames and the surrounding area. They were quite well estab-

<sup>3</sup> No details are available, but the homestead was obviously rebuilt before the farm was sold in 1917



lished, with a three-bedroom homestead, a dairy for producing cream and butter, a two-bale cowshed (all built by the Crosbys) and stables for three horses (built by the Lyes, of timber pit-sawn on site and a shingle roof). There was a large vegetable garden and a fruit orchard and coal was mined from near the Waiwawa River at the eastern end of the property (Clover 2004; Sutton 2006). According to Madge Sutton, “we killed our own meat and some we pickled in the big tubs we got from the hotel. We made our own brine and the simple test was when a potato floated in the brine, it was the right density.” (Clover 2004: 762)

Conditions, however, were harsh; particularly the weather. As noted by Madge Sutton: “Dad took out quite a lot of stock which he had bought from farms on the Hauraki Plains. They were yearlings which had been born on the Plains and I think most of them died with the hard conditions... There was also a lot of cold wind. We would cut whitey-wood and five-finger for them but they still died. They were not bred for conditions at Crosbies” (Clover 2004: 762).

In 1926, Joshua Lyes’ health deteriorated and the family moved back to their original house in Irishtown, Thames, after a short period farming in the Kauaeranga Valley. According to Madge Sutton, “the house was left at Crosbies, but someone came up from Tapu, took everything ... and then set the house alight” (Clover 2004: 768). However, the Lyes family retained ownership of their block until it was subsumed into the Coromandel Forest Park in 1970 (Sutton 2006).

The ownership history of the other blocks has not been investigated, but evidence suggests one block remained in private ownership when the Coromandel Forest Park was formed. Some topographic maps show one block that is not part of the park (e.g., InfoMap 336-11, Coromandel, 1:100,000). Modern survey maps of the area also show the block immediately to the north west of the Crosbie/Lyes block is still in private ownership (Dunwoodie 2006 and supporting maps).

One of the major problems influencing the long-term future of the settlement was access – this issue was raised many times over the years, with Isdale (Undated: 26, 29, 30, 86, 110, 114, 181) recording it as being discussed by the Thames County Council on at least seven different occasions. Initially access was by foot only, then by horseback, and at one stage this was improved enough to allow access by horse-drawn sledge. However, erosion meant this capability was short-lived (Clover 2004: 746). In 1923, when the Tapu-Coroglen road was being planned, a proposal was made to route the road to Thames via Crosbies Settlement, rather than through Tapu. The route via Crosbies would have been approximately six miles shorter and have a

lesser gradient. However, taking into account already existing roading between Tapu and Thames, the Crosbies route would have been more expensive, and the option was rejected (Isdale n.d.: 181).

In 1966, Isdale (Undated: 203) records that Crosbies Settlement was rated as “not suitable for development (already practically deserted as erosion of skeletal soils had taken over so that ... sheep were getting bogged in the fields. By now getting overgrown).” By the mid 1960s the cleared area had reverted to approximately 50% bush and was farmed on a small scale by a Mr Alfie Boyer who lived on the Thames Coast and travelled to and from Crosbies on horseback via the Te Puru track (personal recollections of the author, 1967–69). It is not clear whether Alfie Boyer owned any land there, or was simply squatting.

By the late 1960s the only building in the area still standing was a small single-bail woolshed (complete with shearing equipment) with an adjoining hut containing a few bunks. This was at the northern end of the settlement, on the block owned by Charles Wright. In 1970 the Coromandel Forest Park was established. The Crosbies Settlement area (apparently less one block) became part of the park and the woolshed was converted into a trampers’ hut by the then New Zealand Forest Service. The hut blew over in the late 1970s or early 1980s (Donald 2006, and personal recollection of the author).

The latest noteworthy event in the history of the settlement was a very sad one, and gained national media exposure for the site. In 1989 a pair of Swedish tourists, Urban Hoglin and Heidi Paakkonen, went missing while tramping in the area. A detailed search was conducted, concentrating on the Crosbies area, but only one body was ever found, about 30 kilometres away, near Whangamata. In 1990, David Tamihere was charged and convicted of murdering the couple (NZPA 2000). There is a memorial to the couple situated on top of the lookout hill at the southern end of the settlement.

## **The site**

A site survey was conducted on 22 October 2006 by Hannah Cowie, David Carley and the author. The initial intention was to camp at the site for two to three nights but, due to poor weather, this was changed to a day-trip. With eight hours required to tramp in and out, time on site was reduced to around five hours. The party approached from the Tapu Hill and departed from the memorial lookout, to Thames via the Waiotahi track.

A search was conducted around The Pines area, based on a marked photo supplied by Ray Sutton. This was taken from the lookout hill at the southern end of the settlement around the 1920s and shows the locations of the farm buildings relative to the shelter belts, and other features of the farm.



Due to the short time available on site, the “oil spot” search method was used. A GPS waypoint was plotted from a geo-referenced 1944 air photo and used to locate the north-eastern corner of the prominent pine shelter belts (the area where the buildings were concentrated). The search radiated out from this point.

Numerous artefacts were found, including items of farm machinery, sheets of galvanised iron, fences and a number of low stone walls (Figures 4–6 show some of these). No building sites were definitely identified; however, sheets of galvanized iron were found in the vicinity of the Crosbie/Lyes homestead site.

A further survey was conducted on 5 January 2007, with the aim of locating the sites of the NZFS hut and homestead on the block owned by C.D. Wright, at the northern end of the settlement. The probable site of the NZFS hut was located, although no artefacts were found (presumably the building debris was removed at some stage). Due to lack of time and particularly hot weather, no attempt was made to locate the Wright homestead site. The site record (T12/1010) has been updated to reflect this later survey.



*Figure 4. Part of chaff cutter and old beer bottle.*



*Figure 5. Harrow, with tines approx 10 cm long.*



*Figure 6. Low stone wall. Several such walls were found, in the vicinity of the milking shed site.*

The fact that the site survey was conducted by an amateur archaeologist, with assistance from recent archaeology graduates, was the cause of some difficulty, and resulted in a “please explain” email from the Historic Places Trust when the survey was advertised on the NZAA “dig” web page. It would be helpful if the NZAA addressed the issue of amateur involvement in the site surveys and recording, and possibly provided some guidelines, mentoring and/or training.

### **Significance and management**

As stated previously, Crosbies Settlement is part of the Waikawau block which was acquired by the Crown from Ngati Tamatera in 1872 under circumstances that are currently before the Waitangi Tribunal as part of the Hauraki claim (Waitangi Tribunal document WAI 418 B1 2002). The portion of the block that became known as Crosbies Settlement is not specifically mentioned in the Hauraki claim and it does not appear to hold any special significance for iwi (such as wahi tapu).

The decision to develop the area was consistent with the policies of the then colonial government – to increase the area under settlement, develop farming and (particularly in an area already well known for its gold deposits) encourage prospecting. This philosophy is well illustrated by a *Thames Advertiser* article (1881) which records that:

The settlement of the waste lands in this peninsula is a matter of importance to the Thames, and every step in that direction deserves the greatest encouragement from ... the government. Some months ago five Thames men were brave enough to apply for and take up 1350 acres of land, under the Homestead Act, situated on the Waikawau Block... the journey from Thames township, although only about fourteen miles, occupied at present about five and a half hours ... there is every prospect of gold being obtained in the district.

The article goes on to record that the Thames County Council allocated £20 for the opening of a track.

Successful farming and/or mining ventures in other remote parts of the Coromandel Peninsula no doubt raised hopes that similar results could have been obtained at Crosbies Settlement. However, the lack of any significant gold find and the major access problem resulted in low occupancy, limited land clearing and the eventual abandonment of the settlement. In this regard it can be thought of as similar to other failed settlement ventures such as Mangapurua, in the Whanganui district (Bates 1983). In the latter case, farm blocks were allocated to soldiers returning from World War 1 as part of a rehabilitation scheme.





*Figure 7. View of The Pines area from the memorial lookout hill in the 1920s, with Maunaupaki (Camel's Back) on the horizon. The light-coloured building in the middle ground is the stable built by the Lyes family. The homestead was behind the large pine tree immediately to the left of the stable.*



*Figure 8. Similar view in 2006 – the amount of re-growth is readily apparent.*



*Figure 9. Memorial to Swedish tourists Urban Hoglin and Heidi Paakkonen.*

The Crosbies Settlement site is considered to have moderate archaeological significance because it typifies settlement policies and activities of the late nineteenth century, albeit in this case representing a failure. However, the fact that it was a failure means that the site (apart from the re-growth of vegetation) is still largely in an original and undisturbed state.

The name Crosbies Settlement (or Crosbies Clearing) is widely displayed on local maps and track information boards. However, there is no on-site (or little off-site for that matter) interpretation provided, apart from the memorial to the Swedish tourists, which does not highlight the original history of the settlement. The area is the hub of a number of tracks, and most tourists would pass the DoC “Crosbies Clearing” sign without any appreciation of its heritage significance. As the site is part of the Coromandel Forest Park, the author considers that an interpretation panel, at least, should be provided. Brochures could also be made available at DoC and local council information centres.

Close examination of the 1944 air photos (which do not cover the whole settlement area) reveal about six possible building sites or artificial structures, apart from those around The Pines area. Therefore, opportunities exist for more detailed site surveys.

In terms of site management there is heavy re-growth of bush, estimated at over 90% since the 1944 air photos. This situation will worsen over time, and artefacts will become increasingly difficult to find, unless marked and tracks to them cleared. A management plan should be developed for the site, or at least it should be included in other historical site management plans for the Coromandel Forest Park.

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