

# Cape Kidnappers Station

Graham Twist Supervisor ~ Alec Tuanui Manager  
2,025 HA (1,215ha effective, 810ha golf, forestry and bush)  
No.8S (0:3.6:0:8) @ 375kg/ha

Many changes have taken place on Cape Kidnappers Station since featuring in a Hatuma Update back in 2001. An obvious one is the name-change that now fittingly reflects the famous icon it is situated on. Another is the new 7.5km tar-sealed road that twists, rises and drops through a weathered valley, complete with eleven bridges that now guarantees all users access in heavy rain. For the first-timer, once past the new electric gates at the entrance there is a sense of adventure to be had without the compromise of safety, making it one of the most unique driveways in the country. Then again, not all driveways lead to one of the top fifty golf courses in the world - easily the biggest change at the station in four years.



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► Prior to the creation of the golf course, Cape Kidnappers Station was finishing off a long-winded developmental stage using income only. Overseer, Graham Twist, and the station's manager, Alec Tuanui, had worked for almost a decade on increasing the stock numbers, fencing, reliable water, rebuilding dams and buying in young quality breeding stock. In fact, for the first two years fertiliser was not on the agenda. However, Graham had always known the benefits of using Hatuma dicalcic phosphate after first applying it on an old property in Southern Hawke's Bay during 1967. Therefore when the time came, Hatuma was the first point of call.

"Our budget only allowed us to fertilise 400ha of the better paddocks with Hatuma's No.14S (40% dicalcic phosphate sulphur / 60% Cropfine lime) at 370-500kg/ha, the ones we could get to by ground spreader," recalls Alec. "Within a couple of years we started seeing major improvements, like the ratstail becoming more sparse and opening up to allow the better quality feed to come through."

But the completion got put on hold with a new change in ownership, and Graham and Alec were suddenly faced with a fresh and exciting challenge. The Cape's picturesque environment, with its stunning white cliffs and hum of the ocean below, provided the perfect backdrop for a world-class feature, an international golf course. A new era for the station was about to be embarked upon. "The purchase of Cape Kidnappers Station by American businessman Julian Robertson resulted in huge beneficial developments. His key objective was to maintain and complement the natural environment with minimal effect to the farm operation; as a result even the clubhouse looks like a woolshed," comments Graham.

Before construction of the 160ha course could start the total area was completely stripped. "Although some of the prime land was ear marked for the golf course, Julian was also determined to invest in an accelerated farm development program," says Alec. "Over a two year period major improvements took place, with this year alone, 130ha being re-grassed, watered and fenced. To be involved in this project while observing the huge undertaking of the golf course and its completion has been a fairly amazing experience."

"We keep the same identity but two factions. In fact, the designers of the golf course didn't want it to stand out in typical neon green, so to blend in with the rest of the station, the irrigation on the fairways is reduced over the summer," says Graham.

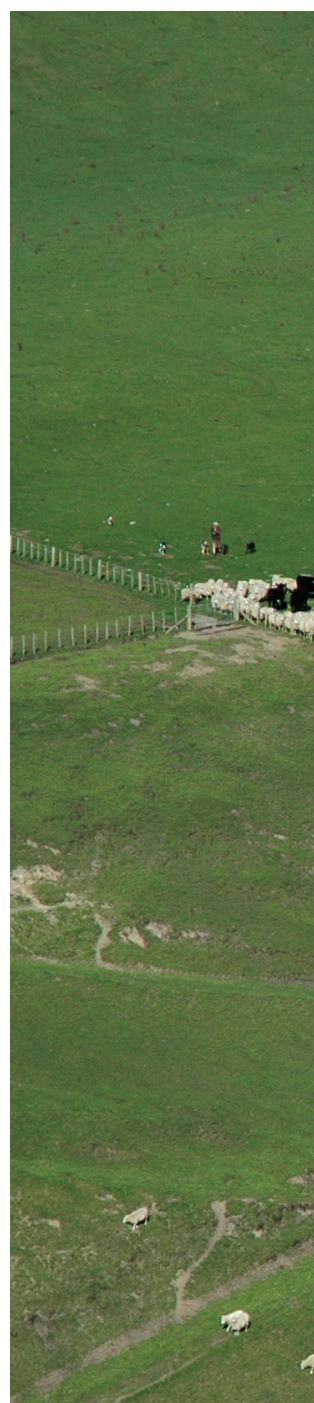
When Graham and Alec were looking for a new head shepherd, they were after someone who could handle the rigours of a large farm environment, but at the same time have experience in the public arena. It was not your typical shepherd job description. When Hayden Rees-Jones applied though, with his Smedley Station training and Agrodome experience in both Rotorua and Japan, it was obvious straight away he was the perfect applicant for Cape Kidnappers Station. "When he first came though there was plenty of development still in progress, and he was wondering what he had struck," says Alec. The third member of the team is Trent Hawke, a farm cadet attending a three year I.T.O Ag Course.

Graham and Alec are extremely happy with the fast resurgence of development taking place on the station once again. This includes last year being the first time the whole station was able to be top-dressed. "A lot of the coastal land, especially the hill country seemed to be deficient in lime. We put 375kg/ha of No.8S (80% dicalcic phosphate sulphur / 20% Cropfine lime) on the 1015ha of hill country and we've already seen results. The pasture has now become a lot sweeter, leading to better grazing. I know after another couple of years of applying it onto the hills it will make a huge difference," says Graham.

"Production is rapidly increasing," says Alec. "We're now wintering around 700 head of cattle, and approximately 6,000 sheep. We had to reduce a thousand ewes when construction of the golf course began. With everything completed and our improved quality of grazing, we are now able to fatten extra lambs. In the last couple of years we've been able to finish all our own tail-end ewe lambs and male lambs. This will be our first year we've been able to go out and buy in more trading lambs."

The ewe hoggets this year are doing exceptionally well with no signs of grass staggers. With good quality feed we are producing better stock. Maintaining ongoing improvement of the stock health is a serious business which we constantly monitor. Ten years ago, every lamb was susceptible to dags, but now out of 600-700 first draft, we might get a dozen minimal cases at the most. Lambs that were brought in from out of the district struggled, so B12 was administered to perk them up."

"We're not strictly commercial," says Graham. "We've got to be mindful of the thousands of people that go through the property, which gives this environment an almost 'farm park' label. With the constant flow of tourists venturing to the gannet colonies we have to be on the ball all the time. We are also mindful of the seasonal extremes, but



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Graham Twist, Supervisor







► we aim to increase ewe numbers slightly and the additional carrying capacity will be trading stock."

"This year we found the quality of feed was around for a longer period of time," says Alec. "The area that traditionally had the dicalcic application responded quickly after rain. The rougher country with the native pasture is taking a little longer. However, with the response we've seen so far after the first application of No.8S, it will be only a matter of time before similar results are achieved. Already we're seeing better quality clover starting to come through."

"Dicalcic application is very cost effective," says Graham. "Initially we used No.14S ground spread, but now fertilising hill country with a plane and a lighter application rate of the No.8S makes it more economical. The pH which has been traditionally low, is now improving. The way I see it, the soil is like a swimming pool, you can put in all the chemicals in the world, but still end up with lousy water. You have to get the pH right first – to get the balance back."

"By using dicalcic and Cropfine we are doing things more efficiently," says Alec. "Quality of grass is far more important than the quantity. We applied nitrogen on a small block pre-calving for the first time last year during a pinch period, but that's been the only time we've felt it was required."

"We use nitrogen on the crops, but we have never used it as a blanket dressing across the farm and I doubt we ever will. Fertiliser sales people tend to promote nitrogen and nothing else which is rather limiting. I'd prefer to put the money into something that has longevity. We have no problem maintaining the clover and after almost forty years

of dicalcic use I know it works," comments Graham.

"We haven't soil tested recently, as we are seeing good results, but we test for trace element deficiencies in our stock which are showing minimal requirements. It is extremely cost effective to use No.8S in comparison to other products on the market. Now other fertiliser companies are promoting lime which is reinforcing its importance. Cape Kidnappers Station has turned around incredibly since using dicalcic and we are finding neighbouring farms are now using it as well," says Graham.

"Looking back to the day we first stepped onto the station compared to now with the golf course and the other developments . . . we are looking forward to the next five years continuation of other initiatives and improvement in conjunction with the use of dicalcic."

**Above:**  
▲ The development has meant 130ha has been able to be regressed

**Below:**  
From left to right: Trent, Alec, Hayden and Graham ▼

