

# Permits for peace at Lilybank

Recreational hunters will soon be able to again enjoy their sport on much of Lilybank Station. Peter O'Neill looks at what has at times been a strained relationship between hunters and station management.

Lilybank Station hopes that a sometimes fiery relationship between it and recreational hunters will come to an end with the imminent return of much of the leasehold land to the crown.

Twenty-five thousand hectares of Lilybank's 27,000 hectares are due to be handed over within the next few days, the first significant surrender of high country pastoral land.

Lilybank Station, situated 32 kilometres north of Lake Tekapo village, will continue to operate a game hunting and hotel business on the 2000 hectares, and also has a two-year recreational permit over the surrendered land.

The principal difference will be that recreational hunters will also be able to seek Department of Conservation permission to shoot there.

Lilybank Station has been operated as a farm and commercial safari hunting operation for 25 years, and while not open freely to recreational hunters, the lure of good numbers of wild thar and the vastness of the area has meant some hunters have ventured on to the land without permission.

Access to the area is made easier by a public road running along the western boundary of Lilybank, leading to national park areas where hunters can shoot with DOC permission.

There was some conflict when Gary Joll and Ron Spanton ran a commercial hunting operation on Lilybank from 1970 until 1992, and this has increased under present owners, Tommy Hutomo, of Indonesia, and Alan Poe, of Singapore.

Under the present on-station management of Gerard Olde-Olthof, four complaints of trespassing have been reported to the Tekapo police, and a station spokesman, who declined to be named, said there had been instances of property damage.

In his time, Gary Joll can recall two or three prosecutions for trespassing.

"We were recreational hunters ourselves and could understand them. They were inclined not to understand us. But overall we had a very good relationship with most sectors of the community. We never denied trampers, climbers or four-wheel-drive clubs, and we accepted that the public road was a public road."

The Lilybank spokesman reiterated Mr Joll's comments. "We have mutually different objectives, hunters want to hunt, Lilybank is deadly serious about running a business. We have spent a lot of money building an exclusive hotel there, created a lot of jobs locally, and we want to bring people in, people who want privacy and peace."



The Weka Hut, taken down by Lilybank Station staff. Lilybank said the huts were run down and were removed, while hunters maintain they provided a safety net. There were three huts on the property.

Lilybank's spokesman said the company had not realised the nature or level of antagonism that existed.

"Over time it was handled on an ad hoc basis by us and probably not that well. It was a difficult situation for anyone to be in. We all have strengths and weaknesses, perhaps Gerard's strengths aren't totally in the public relations area, but he's got other strengths. Gerard has the support of shareholders. He is working hard to make the business run, which is what we are interested in."

In recent years recreational hunters have felt aggrieved at what they see as over-zealous policing of access. The Mackenzie District Council became involved in June when a locked gate was placed across the public road, coming after news that huts on the property were removed and, in more recent months, that an intensive thar cull was being conducted in the surrendered area.

The spokesman said that whatever Lilybank said about the huts some people would criticise. "The huts were removed as part of a general clean-up of the land prior to return to the crown. They were in a very shabby condition and we are talking about events that happened two years ago."

"We have been reluctant to comment on details of damage caused by recreational hunters at Lilybank and in that context our reluctance to discuss the removal of the huts can be understood."

"We are trying to restore the land in pristine condition, and the wider community has an interest in that. To some the huts were an intrusion in the land-

scape, and the thar were too.

The spokesman said that Lilybank's lease required it to keep noxious animals under control. "Thar numbers got well out of control. As thar numbers grew recreational hunters got more and more interested in the land and the conflict grew and grew."

"We were required to keep noxious animals under control, which we hadn't. We had a request from the Commissioner of Crown Lands and DOC to do something about it before the lease terminated. It has been our aim to reduce numbers to the agreed management level. They have certainly not been eradicated."

The spokesman was reluctant to say how many animals were shot, saying the figure would be out of context without knowing how many were left.

Some rare white thar are within Lilybank's retained area.

Gary Joll said that there were about 4000 thar on the property when he sold it three years ago, but he had no way of knowing what had happened since. He agreed that it would be impossible to shoot every animal, and said that a cull was necessary.

Mr Joll that the huts were there for the goodwill and safety of everyone. "Maps will forever have those huts marked on them, and they provided safety if someone was injured or got caught in a storm."

The overall feeling now though is that the overseas owners are keen to restore some harmony. The spokesman, who last month met with Mr Poe in Singapore, said there was considerable

concern among shareholders about the negative feelings generated about Lilybank.

"They want to be part of the local community. To them the local community is the most important aspect of doing business in New Zealand."

He hoped the surrender would remove a lot of the conflict. "People can now feel they can go where they want to and leave Lilybank in peace and we all get on better."

Lilybank intends developing the hotel business to people from all over the world who wanted to appreciate the high country.

"And we are delighted recreational shooters will have more access. We are not insincere when we say delighted. We want to share it with everyone. This will take a lot of pressure off us. We have been as keen as anyone to get this surrender done, because frankly it has become unpleasant. We hope old wounds are going to be healed. We just ask that recreational hunters respect what we are trying to do there."

"We want to involve the local community, and there will be occasions for open days. We want to show them what we are doing so we can get their support."

Peter Rathgen, president of the South Canterbury Deerstalkers' Association, said that his group accepted that Lilybank had a safari operation to run.

"We are quite open to dialogue if there is a problem. I can't see any retribution from our members."

He agreed with Mr Joll that the huts provided a safety net.