CHAPTER 3

NGAWI

Ngawi is about fishing. It has been that way for a long time. Maori had tapped the bountiful resources of Palliser's south-east coast well before the Europeans arrived and some of the earliest Polynesian settlements in New Zealand were located here. When settlers arrived in mid-nineteenth century southern Wairarapa Maori were still coming to replenish their supplies of fish. Today, it is the line of fishing boats along the beach at Ngawi that is the distinctive feature of a compact settlement, nestling against the hills.

After the disappearance of those mysterious people who had settled between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, Maori never returned to live permanently in the south-east extremities of Palliser Bay, but each year hapu from the southern Wairarapa came, usually in November, to harvest the fishing resource. Kina, paua, crayfish and edible seaweed or Karenga could be gathered in shallow water, and huge hapuka, or groper, were taken off the rocks to the south of Ngawi. Simple but ingenious technology preserved the catch. Paua and crayfish tails were strung out on flax twine and dried. Karenga was also dried and would keep indefinitely until revived when hot water was poured over it. Ovaries and tongues of kina were packed in jars with the tops sealed by raw potatoes, reputed to have qualities which kept the food fresh. The jars were cooled inside wet woollen socks which were dampened in every stream on the way home. Hapuka usually left by packhorse, inside wet sacks with seaweed packed around them, their massive tails protruding from the bags. Four fish were often a load.

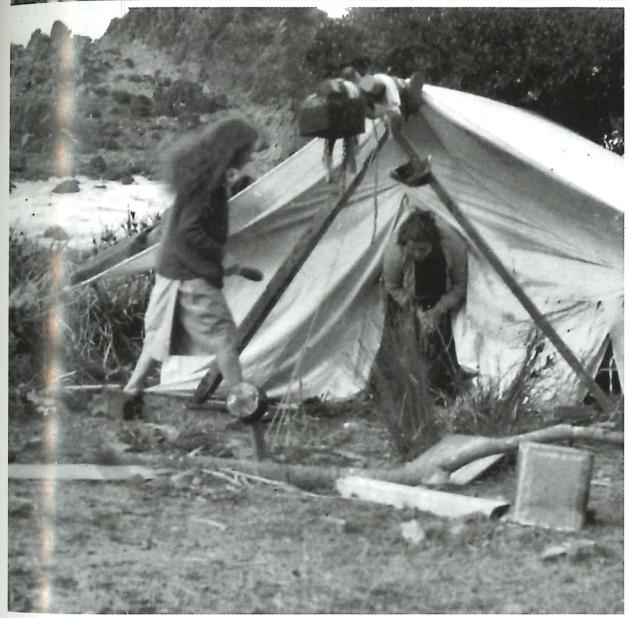
Although European settlers arrived in Palliser Bay in the 1840s, the first Europeans to live permanently in this corner of the Bay were the families who manned the lighthouse at the end of the century. Sheep from Pharazyn's Whatarangi Station did graze right down to the Stonewall Creek, where a rock wall had been built to prevent stock straying onto White Rock Station and, occasionally, shepherds came to check or muster them. Few other people found any reason to visit. There was no road, and the only route south of Whangaimoana was a horse track, partly along the beach, with access dependent on the tides and the state of the streams and rivers. Whatarangi Station supplied itself by sea and sent the wool out the same way.

The outside world became more accessible when the Depression of the thirties brought some improvement to road communications. Public works camps at Tommy Dick's Creek and the Putangirua Pinnacles built the

Opposite: Josh De Menech launches a crayfish pot.

first roads into south-east Palliser Bay. It was not an easy venue for road construction. The route down into the Hurupi River valley was completed in 1936, but only with great difficulty. The hillside was almost sheer, and work was advanced by lowering workers from the top of the slope on ropes, so they could hand-drill holes in the rock, into which they tamped explosives to blast a way forward. Meanwhile, pick and shovel laboriously dug a one-way track along the Whatarangi bluffs to open the way south along the coast. When all the work was finished, travel was still difficult. The Huripi hill was so steep the ubiquitous model T Ford cars had to reverse up the slope because their gravity fuel systems could not work on such an incline, and it was common for people to park at the top of the hill and walk the rest of the way. The road from there to Whatarangi was really just a track; and past Whatarangi there was no road at all, except for wheel tracks worn into the ground. The first travellers to make the trip after the last rain would find each creek had cut low shingle banks and they had to stop and dig an entry and exit with shovels. Ian Sutherland recalled travelling from Whakatomotomo to Mangatoetoe in the 1930s when the trip took the whole day. By the 1950s a rough road ran through to the lighthouse, but there were still no bridges and the rivers were often impassable.

Nevertheless, a handful of campers had begun to make the effort to reach Ngawi in the 1920s. By the 1930s, with road access, the number was growing. It was a holiday for the self-sufficient and hardy on sheltered sites amongst the tauhinu scrub. It paid to be well prepared. There were no baches, shops, services or any other amenities, and it was a long trip out. But these were golden days. Camps would be safe even if left unattended for weeks, as would fishing gear parked on the beach. The fishing was fabulous. Pop Hurndell talked of catching seven groper off the Matakitaki



Early campers at Ngawi needed to be hardy and self-sufficient but the rewards were great. The abundance of large crayfish is scarcely credible today. (Photos: top, McIlraith; bottom right, Hurndell; bottom left, McIlraith)

Opposite: Ngawi village today. It is a compact little settlement and there are no plans for development.

The spectacular recreational fishing at Ngawi in the 1950s and 1960s was the main attraction for holiday makers. (Photos: clockwise from top left, Sims, McIlraith, Wyeth, Firmin, Hurndell, Firmin.)

rocks in half an hour and, even with the help of his mates, struggling to carry the monsters back across the sandy beach. In a small boat a few hundred metres out, anyone could catch as many blue cod as they wanted, all weighing in at 2 kg or more. An excursion to the Gap could bring thirty butterfish or moki. Crayfish were taken close in by the sackfull, paua picked up as you paddled. The main problem was what to do with the fish. Local Maori would take some to dry but, otherwise, it was hard to give them away.

If the phenomenal fishing was now being sampled by increasing numbers of holiday makers, there was little commercial fishing based in the area. Lack of any anchorage in Palliser Bay and the distance to the Wellington market were major problems. Italian fishermen from Island Bay fished the Palliser area but it was a long trip, requiring a lengthy spell of fine weather to make it worth the effort. The first commercial fishing venture based in Palliser Bay began in 1921 when Harry Stewart and Archie Haycock started their operations from a Ngawi base. It was a shaky start. They had purchased an 18-foot clinker boat powered by a Lister engine in Wellington but, coming around the coast, the motor gave out and the craft was driven ashore and lost. Undeterred, the two men set up camp in the tauwhini and began fishing off Ngawi from a 12-foot dinghy. Other fishermen were usually part-timers like Jim Thorner who arrived to work at Whatarangi Station in 1929 and took out a fishing license in 1935.

Catching commercial quantities of fish was not a problem. Harry Stewart's daughter recalled her father catching 90 sacks of crayfish off a reef close inshore. Jim Thorner acknowledged his stories strained credulity but was adamant they simply reflected the fishery of the time. He once took 12 groper in shallow water in less than an hour, each weighing around 70 pounds. He trawled for turbot off Lake Ferry on many occasions, usually landing 60 or 70 fish weighing about 6 lb on each haul. But perhaps his most illuminating story tells of catching a hundred snapper on one line. The fish were taken to Pirinoa and sold for a shilling a piece. At this price Thorner was able to quit a quarter of the fish but he was forced to give the rest away. That was the problem. The fishing was great but selling the catch was difficult. Most of the commercial catch went by launch to Wellington because land travel was so slow and unreliable. Stewart depended on a Harley Davidson motorbike and side-car to pick his way in and out over the rough route.

Post World War Two, Ngawi still did not exist as a permanent community. Two photos taken in 1947 show a settlement consisting of two baches, one of

them belonging to Bill Busch, and an almost deserted beach featuring a couple of rowboats and a small group of people. There was a house for the Ngawi Station manager, but even the lifestyle at the homestead was less than gracious. When Margaret and Graham Tilson farmed there in the 1960s it is clear that the mod cons, which were now part of everyday life for most New Zealanders, had not made it down the coast.

> "....We had an old coal range but it wouldn't draw. Had to clean the soot out every couple of days.... there was a well in the corner of the section and I used to get the water in a bucket....I learned to milk the cow and how to separate the milk from the cream to make my butter....I helped Graham on the farm when he needed me....made my own bread.... the kids had their own desk for lessons and I organised the correspondence....kept them at it....had a kerosene fridge. It was a fair b----d of a thing....did the washing in a copper and heated the irons on the coal range....
>
> "I howled my eyes out the day we left the coast. I was broken-hearted." (Margaret Tilson 2010)

Even during the 1950s through to the 1970s the isolation was still very real. There was a road north

The condition of the road to Ngawi until the 1980s varied between bad and atrocious but following heavy rain the fords became an even bigger problem. (Photo: McIlraith.)

now but its condition varied between poor and atrocious. In any case, travel depended on the state of the numerous fords, frequently impassable in winter. The farmhouse expected to be cut off, sometimes for weeks at a time. Elizabeth Deller, who grew up on Ngawi Station, remembers her mother buying her groceries by the case or sack. Assuming medical help would probably be out of reach when it was needed, Dr Budd of Martinborough provided a massive annual prescription of common medications at the start

Bill Busch's bach, the best known of the very early baches at Ngawi, is the building on the left. (Photo: Wairarapa Archive.)

of each winter. Road closures were just a fact of life that people lived with. Rex and Margaret Hurndell remember being cut off for ten days, by which time rabbit stew was appearing as the evening meal.

Nevertheless, more baches appeared at Ngawi and along the surrounding coastline. In 1962 the annual general meeting of the Ngawi Emergency Club, formed in 1960 to promote the interests of bach owners, was attended by 50 individuals and the committee identified 38 bach owners at Ngawi or close by. They were squatters on land belonging to Ngawi Station in return for a small ground rental. There was no plan to the settlement. By now there was a formed gravel road along the foreshore to the lighthouse from which tracks worn into the grass led off in all directions to the scattered baches.

They were typical baches of the era. Often only one or two rooms in size, with flat roofs, and clad with a variety of left-over wall board materials or corrugated iron, they lacked most amenities. 'Long-drops' took care of sewage. Water came either from the sky or pipes run from the springs at the base of the hills. If there was power it was by diesel generator and, although a phone line came through the area, access to the one party line was courtesy of the Tilsons in the only substantial house.

Nonetheless, the baches were the basis of a real holiday community. Many of the families who built these first spartan dwellings retain their links to Ngawi. Some of the baches are still there. Names and families such as Bill Busch, often credited with being the first bach owner, the Tilsons – father Tui and son Graham – who farmed the Ngawi station, Fred Yule, Laurie Turner, Eric Cameron, Paddy Lynch, Bill Attwood, Johny Bornholdt, Bobbie Jones, the De Menechs, Hurndells, Hayes, Fergusons, Wanganui Bill, Bill Fenwick, the Sinclairs, Jones, Raits, the 'Robbies of Purity Lodge' and, of course, Mita Carter, are still familiar in Ngawi.

Those who were there look back on the era with great fondness. The fishing was still fabulous. Rex Hurndell remembered strolling around to the rocks at night with a torch when the tide was low, seeing crayfish walking around on the exposed kelp, and gathering them by the sackful. He recalled going down to the sea in his pyjamas to throw in a crayfish pot and then going back to bed. In his letter to the editor of the *Chronicle* on 18 May 1987 when Bill Fenwick died, Mita Carter reminisced about the Ngawi holiday lifestyle; the group trips to Lake Ferry Hotel for "supplies", rigging the snooker games they played there to ensure Bill, their driver, won and they would stay longer; testing water from creeks on the way home to see

which blended best with Vat 69 whisky; practical jokes such as lifting mates' craypots, replacing crayfish with bottles of beer and watching their reaction through binoculars. He talked of the New Year parties in the woolshed in the days when the Tilsons still farmed at Ngawi. Entry was by invitation only with a carefully selected guest list. They were nights to remember. Neil Rait recalls the musical entertainment with Mita Carter on piano, Bob Jones on the drums, and Neil himself contributing with ukulele or guitar.

The bach owners talk of the sharing that took place. Before the advent of deep freezers it made sense to share your surplus fish or any other perishables. People travelling out for supplies would return with mail and necessities for others. There were groups among the owners, each with their own identities. Oldtimers shake their heads and smile at the mention of Wanganui Bill and his associates from the Wanganui railway workshop, and they remember Mita Carter communicating with his mates in other baches by loud hailer as the sun sank towards the yardarm. Everyone knew everyone else. Doors were seldom locked.

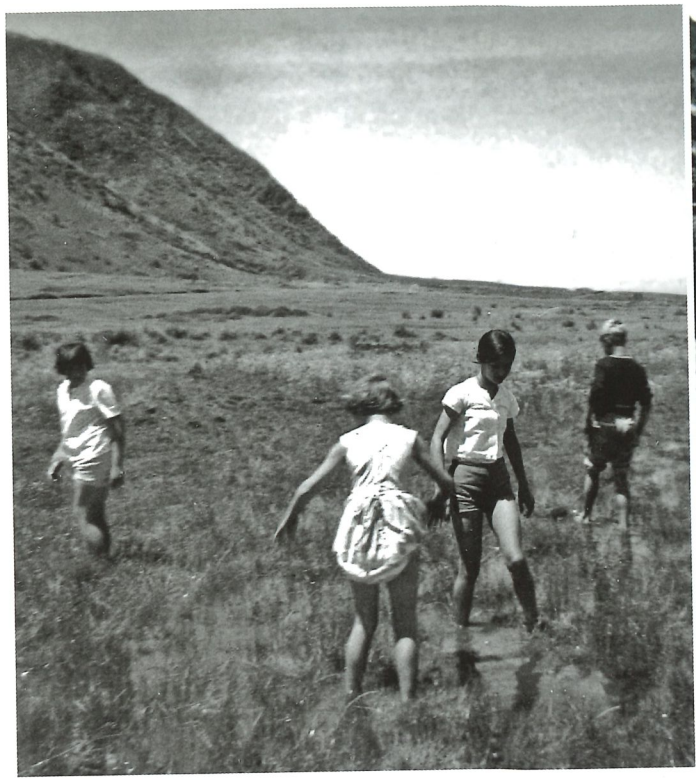
However, the trip down the coast was still daunting. Pat Carter, Mita Carter's wife, had some interesting journeys.

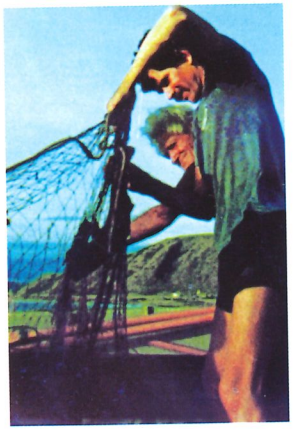
> "It was when Louise, my first child, was about four months old. We had an old Ford truck Mita used for his carpentry. It was wet and Mita said, 'I can't work. We'll go down to the coast.' 'But Mita it's raining. The rivers might be up.' He said we would be alright but he would have told me anything. The Hurupi was alright and then the Pinnacles was O.K. too. Then we got to the Paraki and it was wild and brown but it spreads out so it was still quite shallow and we got through alright. Then we came to the Kawakawa. It was in flood and the Kawakawa was all in one channel. I said, 'Mita, we can't go through there we will have to go back.' Mita said, 'We can't go back. The other rivers will be too high now. We'll be alright. It will be a bit of a drop in and you might hear a few stones rattling in the wheels but the old truck will get us there.' Well, I just held on tight to the baby. I was sure we would be washed out into the Bay. PLOMP! We went in and there was this awful clattering noise then Mita said, 'We're through!' 'Well,' I said, 'But we're not going home until those creeks go down!'" (Pat Carter 2010)

Reg Feist and Eric Cameron with a huge groper taken about 1950. (Photo: Sims.)

Opposite: Early baches at Ngawi. The emphasis was on cheap, practical shelter for a rough and ready holiday lifestyle. (Photo: Rait.)

Norm Crew has only just wet his feet to secure this bulging pot of crayfish. (Photo: Wyeth.)





Things changed when the crayfish boom made it possible to make a lot of money with nothing more than a dinghy with an outboard motor. Prior to the late 1960s the standard fishing craft in Palliser Bay was the 'double ender', so named for the curved profile of both bow and stern. They were substantial craft, with in-board engines, well suited to Palliser's rough seas, but they were heavy, requiring a team of two or three to launch them. At sea they lacked speed and manoeuvrability. In 1967 Bob Buckley pioneered the use of light aluminium craft with a 15-foot De Havilland 'tinny' powered by an outboard motor. It featured a winch improvised with typical 'No. 8 Wire' ingenuity by Buckley himself. He launched the boat alone, using inflatable rollers. Locals dismissed the craft as inadequate to cope with Palliser conditions and gloomily predicted an early drowning. Buckley saw it differently.

> "....What they hadn't thought of was that if the weather looked right I could be straight out for two or three hours and if it turned bad I didn't need two or three people to get me out of the water. I could just full throttle in on a wave, up on the sand, jump out with a rope and I'm safe. I could nip into rocks and out again....I could operate on my own." (Bob Buckley 2010)

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However, larger boats had advantages and the technique of launching the fishing boats from trailers caught on early around the coast. The steeply shelving, loose shingle beach at Ngawi was a problem. It was resolved by using tractor tyres on the trailers to avoid sinking into the gravel, and second-hand bulldozers in place of wheeled tractors to gain the extra traction needed to heave the trailer up the steep gravel lip. Residents claim Ngawi is the only settlement anywhere which boasts more bulldozers than people. Over time, the boats have become bigger, the towbars longer, but the line of aluminium boats on trailers hooked to old dozers remains a unique feature.

By the late 1960s a number of fishermen focussed on the crayfish were operating from Ngawi on a permanent basis. In contrast to the carpetbagger mentality of the Fiordland and Chatham fishermen, who had ruthlessly exploited those fisheries, the Ngawi pioneers were usually local men, often from families with a long association with the area. From the beginning there was the intent to establish a permanent industry with settled operators. Most fishermen at Ngawi came to stay. Barry Brough and Murray Nix were both sons of past proprietors of the Lake Ferry Hotel. Nix was managing Ngawi Station at the time. Bob Buckley had holidayed in the area and would settle on Whatarangi Station. John Sutherland's family farmed in the district and were associated with Whangaimoana Station. Neil Rait worked as a musterer before beginning to fish. Dave Robinson began by helping Bob Buckley, and would go on to become one of the leading figures in the industry for over thirty years.

Initially, getting catches to processing plants was a problem. Buckley started by transporting his crayfish as far as Paraparaumu, and then, later, to the Hutt Valley. It was a four hour chore to add to the day's hard work of fishing. By 1970 the majority of the catch was

Three generations of Ngawi fishing craft. Inset is a traditional double ender. The trusty *Waitoa* is still fishing and is reputed to have caught more crayfish than any of its younger and bigger brothers.

Ngawi claims more bulldozers per capita than any other town in New Zealand. 'Babes' new paint job distinguishes her from the rest.

Opposite clockwise from top left: There was plenty of space for children at Ngawi but they had to make their own amusements. (Photo: Tilson.)

Adventurous road travel in the 1950s and 1960s. Top left: climbing out of the Hurupi; top right: yet another slip at the Whatarangi bluffs; bottom: crossing the flooded Kawalawa River. (Photos from top left: McIlraith, Hurndell, Rait)

Crayfish accounted for at least 90 percent of Ngawi fishermen's catch but income could be supplemented by net fishing for other species. (Photo: Sims)

ending up with Jurie's Fisheries in Carterton which also financed a number of the early fishermen into their boats. This was closer, but the fishermen were not always satisfied with the prices received, and they looked to take control of their own destiny. In 1970 Barry Brough, Dave Robinson, John Sutherland, and Neil Rait formed the Ngawi Packers to process the catch. The factory built at Ngawi became an integral part of the fishery and community. At its peak Ngawi Packers employed five fulltime, and five part-time

BARRY BROUGH

On 13 September 1996, his friends and family gathered at Barry Brough's funeral. They looked back on the life of one of Palliser's larger than life characters and remembered the massive contribution he had made to the growth of Ngawi and the future the national rock lobster industry. They also remembered the man himself. Brough was an innovative entrepreneur who drove hard bargains and maximised profits. Not everyone had warmed to him for this although no one denied the importance of his success. But on this day the mourners preferred to remember a colourful, adventurous man with a keen sense of humour.

Born on 29 June 1922 Barry Frederick Brough lived in the Wairarapa all of his life apart from time spent on active service with the New Zealand Navy during World War Two. His ship was the *HMNZS Gambia* which is reputed to have fired the last shot in the war at sea in July 1945. Over the last few years of his life, Brough carefully built a wooden scale model of the ship which took him around the world. He had learnt some lessons while he was away. Bill Sedgwick, a shipmate, remembered the key one.

> "We were all given six pounds and three weeks leave and we headed for London. Well, most of us were broke by lunchtime the following day but Barry managed to scrounge a job at the local pie cart. He had food and so did we when the owner wasn't there. He got a shilling for the work he did and he said to me, 'I'm going to drill a hole in this and wear it around my neck and I'll never be broke again.' And he wasn't."

Except for a short stint in the Chatham Islands during the crayfish boom of the 1960s Barry Brough spent the rest of his life in the Wairarapa. He toyed with a number of occupations, looking to find the way to 'never be broke', and started by operating a taxi in Masterton. As Howard Mills remembered, Brough didn't think small even then. "He got the first 1955 Ford V8 in town. It was huge. Stood out everywhere. We called it the Yank Tank."

Apparently, he then gravitated to be the unlikely owner of a hairdressing salon before returning to his home town, Lake Ferry, to take up fishing.

Barry Brough was a serious businessman but he never lost his sense of humour and liking for practical jokes. His sister Paula Brough remembered him fondly.

> "He was a bit of a prankster though. I remember I was going out to golf and I hadn't played much before so I was a bit nervous. Barry put the clubs on the cart the wrong way around so they kept hitting me on the chin. He'd also put a grass grubber into the golf bag and, when I dived in there to get out a club, I pulled that out instead."

In the late 1960s Brough moved to Ngawi where he created history.

workers. A rough airstrip was established at Kawakawa to fly crayfish in from the Chathams but this venture was shortlived. Landing in the teeth of a nor-wester was dodgy to say the least, and there were also problems with the mortality rate of the crayfish. However, the strip did prove useful, occasionally, to transport crayfish from Ngawi to meet Wellington flights when road communications were out.

Through the 1970s and 1980s prices rose, profitability increased and crayfish were plentiful. There were no quotas and a fisherman's catch was limited only by the hours he was prepared to work and the weather. Some of the earliest fishermen raised and lowered their crayfish pots by hand, back breaking work, involving heaving heavy pots to the surface while balancing in a small boat pitching in choppy seas. Consequently, many fishermen quickly gravitated to larger boats which could have inboard winches and carry one or two crew members.

When Ngawi Packers successfully pioneered the export of live crayfish in the 1980s they ensured Ngawi's development into the future as well as making a huge contribution to the whole New Zealand crayfish fishery. Until the 1970s the market for crayfish, 90 percent of the Ngawi catch, was reliant on exporting frozen tails to the United States. Profitability depended on maintaining high volumes of crayfish, threatening the long term viability of the fishery. Barry Brough was interested in the higher returns offered by Asian markets, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, for live crayfish, but no one had been able to solve the difficulties involved. Confined crayfish became aggressive and attacked, even consumed, one another. Under stress, they shed legs, rendering them unacceptable to Asian restaurants.

Despite setbacks, Brough persevered through a lengthy process of trial and error until answers were found. All metal was eliminated from any part of the plant in contact with the water where the crayfish were held. When the crayfish came into the factory late in the day they were placed in seawater tanks, carefully monitored to ensure optimum salinity, temperature and ammonia levels. However, slowly lowering the water temperature overnight, rendering the crayfish sluggish and inactive, was the real key to success. Apparently Brough had noticed that some live crayfish left out in a severe frost in chaff sacks went into a semi-dormant state, but came back to life as the morning temperatures rose. Now, at the last possible moment, the crayfish were taken from the tanks, packed in polystyrene with straw wool, and shipped to connect with flights landing in Asian markets 24 hours later. In the end the factory was achieving a loss rate of only one per cent and business boomed. The advance assumed special importance when the quota system was introduced in 1990, limiting the volume of the catch.

Barry Brough, Ngawi Packers' main source of inspiration and energy, remained at the helm until he retired in 1987. The factory continued to operate until 2004, but the Quota Management System (QMS) brought a sharp decline in the quantity of the catch, and increasing competition from Wellington processors further reduced fish volumes. In 2004 Ngawi Packers was sold to Moana Fish Processors who used the plant for storage until closing the facility completely. The buildings have now been demolished, and there is little sign it ever existed. Nonetheless the factory has a real place in the history of New Zealand's fishery, having pioneered both the live export of crayfish and the marketing into Asia which remain the basis of the industry today.

These were exciting times for the fishermen of Ngawi. They owned boats, crewed them, worked in

Keith Banks, commercial crayfisherman, and crew at work. Fishing is still the mainstay of Ngawi.

the factory. With the rough seas in front, the hills and bush behind, Ngawi was a great place for the 'good, keen man'. The unity of purpose, a sense of being part of a common adventure, coupled with the isolation, promoted a strong feeling of camaraderie. It was a chance to start with very little and build sizeable assets.

Old timers are reluctant to talk of a drinking culture but they concede that if the fishermen worked hard they played equally hard. When Dave Robinson was organising the marriage of his daughter in Ngawi, he recognized the extent of local thirsts and brought the liquid provisions for the great day into the village on a substantial truck, days prior to the wedding. Unfortunately, bad weather prevented the boats going to sea during the interlude. The day before the wedding he sent for another truck.

Women, especially young women with children, had a more jaundiced view of their situation. "I was living my husband's dream," commented one young woman. Raising children in a community isolated from schools, in homes often lacking basic amenities, was never going to be easy, and there were other demands. Some rose to the challenge and loved the life. For others, Ngawi was a love-hate relationship that strained marriages and relationships, even drove women into depression. It could be a very lonely place for new arrivals with their husbands away all day.

> "....Women had to make do with what they had here....some women were working on the boats. They were crew. And some were working in the packing house. Jean Robbie (Robinson)'s story is an example....They started off living in Eastbourne....back and forth all the time. One day she just said 'I'm coming back with you'. Put the kids into the car and they lived in a hut for years. Three little girls. She worked her butt off. Tailed crayfish all day and still saw to the kids. The kids loved it....Ended up with a nice home." (Di Phelps 2010)

At the very least they would be expected to back the trailers to launch and recover the fishing vessels, a tricky manoeuvre when the sea was rough. There were all the other supporting chores to see to, and keeping the increasingly complex paper-work up to date was usually a woman's lot. And there was always that wind.

> "Even myself, I've always had a love hate relationship with the coast. I have travelled quite a lot and, at times, you look out and think where in the world would there be a better place to be? It's just fabulous. Then you get three weeks of blowing, howling gale and you really are ready to kill. We actually had a film crew come out to Ngawi. They were going around the world

finding the six or seven worst places in the world for wind and they had picked Ngawi as one of them!" (Di Phelps 2010)

Effie Linton lived for 23 years at Ngawi from 1971, becoming one of the community's favoured daughters. Effie was a little different from younger women in that she and her husband Stuart took on the fishing later in life. She delayed leaving her comfortable Greytown home to follow Stuart to Ngawi until her last child had finished secondary school. Nonetheless, her recollections give a sense both of the difficulty for a woman coming to the village and how the lifestyle could grow on you.

"I was not happy about going at all. It didn't help that people in Greytown kept saying, 'What's he dragging you down there for? Let him go on his own!'

"Stuart had a caravan there and we lived in that for a start. Later a cheap little bach came up for sale on the corners of Hemi Street and Seaview Drive. I cried when I first saw it but I cried later on when they bulldozed it down.

"Getting to know people wasn't easy. Some of them didn't want us there. Didn't want us to encroach on their fishing. The people who had been there for a while. Won't mention names. So there was not much talking. Such a small tightly knit place. I'm not a lonely sort of person but the younger ones could be quite lonely with their children away at school all day. You had to work at it. In the end we all became such good friends. Just like a big family really.

"Streets were not really formed when we got here. It was so barren. There were no trees and no birds. In Wood Street in Greytown we always woke to the sound of the birds' chorus. Once people could own property they started planting trees.

"After Stuart died in 1987 I stayed there. Didn't ever want to leave. I loved it. It was a very special place and it was a happy place too. Had lots of fun there. It was the best thing that ever happened in my life. I would probably have just gone on living in Greytown....It was so different and I really quite liked that life. You know, being shut in by the rivers. It was such an experience and, when you knew them, the people were lovely." (Effie Linton 2011)

During the 1950s and 1960s the rural delivery van doubled as a school bus to take children from South Palliser on visits to the Pirinoa School. (Photo: Tilson.)

If the fishing folk still had time on their hands it could be spent collecting agar off the beaches to supplement incomes. With the price peaking at $2.20 a kilogram in the 1980s significant income could be generated, particularly if you held a diving permit. Bill Fenwick had picked the weed since the early 1970s and he became the local agent for Coast Biologicals who purchased the agar. The weed was dried on wire-netting racks, packed in wool bales, and stored in

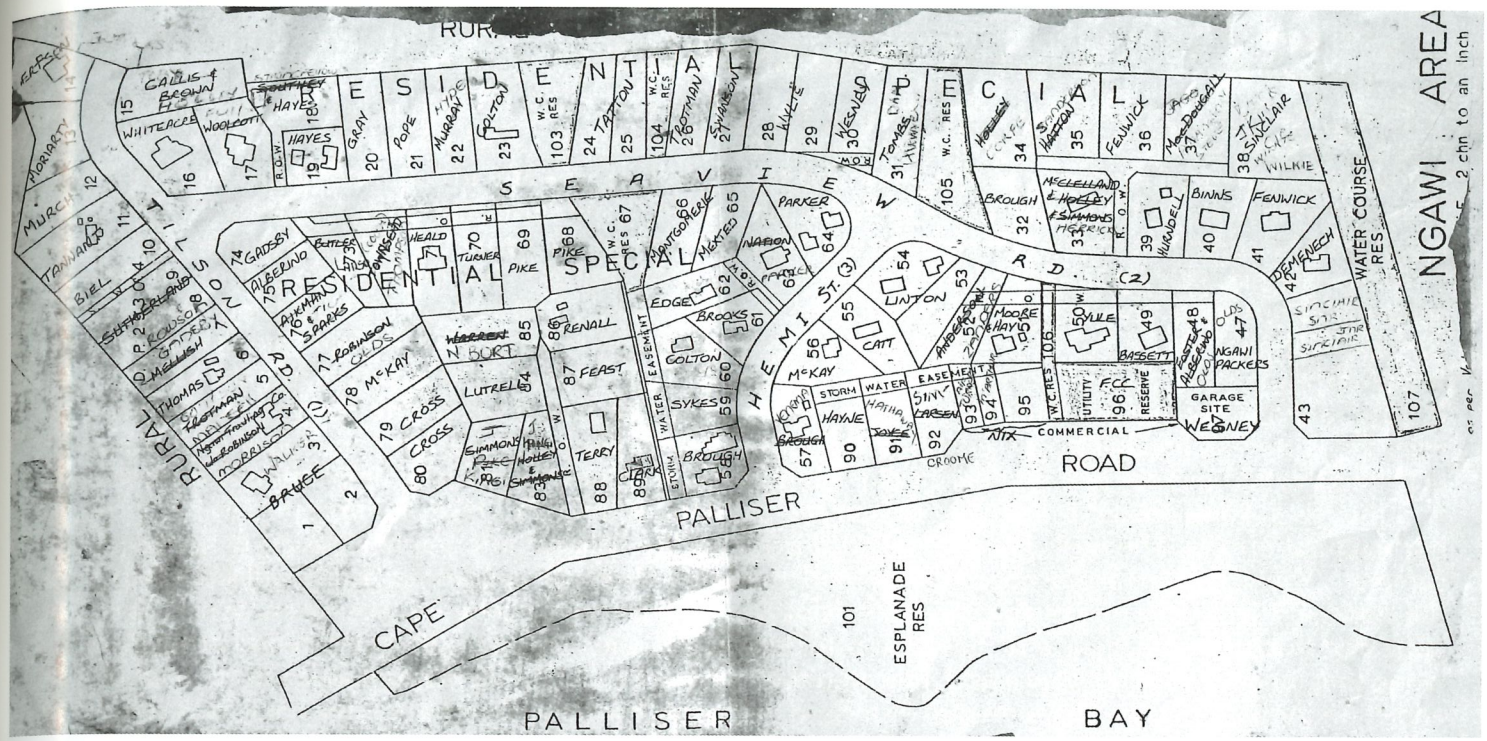
Picking agar was a profitable past time in the 1970s and 1980s. After drying on the racks, the weed was baled and then trucked north. (Photos: Sims, Wyeth (inset).)

Murray Nix's woolshed, sub-leased for the purpose. When the shed was full, or shearing time approached, the bales were trucked north. In times of high prices there were a number of trips each year. With his health declining, Bill handed the agency over to Darlene and Selwyn Joyce in 1985, but by the early nineties the need for an agency had petered out. A few retired residents still supplement their income this way and one or two hold licenses to pick the more profitable 'paddle weed', eclonia radiata, but weed picking is not the significant activity it was.

Through the 1970s and 1980s Ngawi continued to evolve into one of the few genuine fishing villages in the country. From the scattering of flimsy baches linked to the road by rough grass tracks, a thriving community had developed. A 1983 estimate numbered 60 permanent residents with a holiday population at least as large again. Some fishermen had young families, and there were enough children to fill the school bus to Pirinoa. In June 1987 a play group was set up to cater for 10 children under four years-old.

As the number of baches increased it became clear that the informal 'squatter' arrangements needed to be formalised. A subdivision plan was drawn up in the 1960s and sections were on sale from 1967. Never an organisation to rush things, the Featherston County Council waited until 1972 to choose the street names, and only after lengthy discussion with the Tuhirangi-Waihenga Maori. The subdivision was a once only opportunity to buy into the village. There have been no further developments at Ngawi and shadowy intentions of expanding it southwards have been abandoned, leaving a few of the original baches surviving there on a ground rental basis.

Given the mess made of many coastal settlements in areas like the Coromandel and Northland there was much to commend about the Ngawi development. It laid out a compact settlement of 91 residential sections with land set aside for community purposes and sites for utilities. Land between the road and the foreshore became a reserve. The street plan for the subdivision was fitted around the existing baches, and their owners took the opportunity to buy their sites. Better houses now made their appearance. Bach owners still outside the subdivision moved to more formal leasing arrangements with the Maori land owners. The development was not perfect. Developers were not required to seal roads and provide appropriate kerbing and channelling as they are today. This would be a significant issue for some time. Dust was not just a continual nuisance in summer; it also found its way



An early plan of the Ngawi subdivision. The names listed are a veritable who's who of Ngawi identities. (Photo: Wairarapa Archive.)

into rain water tanks, contaminating the water on which most households depended.

Subdivision and legal title did not mean living suddenly became comfortable. Road communications were still difficult. The route north was winding and steep in places, unsealed and dusty in the summer, the fords still impassable for days in bad weather. There was no water reticulation or sewage. Power was available from 1965, but power cuts were frequent, a real problem in a place where reliable refrigeration of catch and bait were vital. Telephone connections had improved since the days residents could only use the Ngawi Station phone, but until 1990 five or more householders shared each party line. There were times when the amperage of the line would be too low to make calls out of Ngawi. Residents called each other to arrange a signal at which everyone would start cranking the handles on their sets at once, drastically boosting the current. Until Murray Nix built a new two-storey house with a small general store underneath, there were no shops. A regular rural delivery mail service could bring in provisions from the Pirinoa store, but bigger supermarkets were more than an hour's drive away.

Education was a problem. A number of the fishermen had young families but the closest primary school was at Pirinoa, the nearest secondary school in Greytown. The school bus service to Pirinoa began in the late

IVAN AND BARRY

Places like Ngawi attract more than their share of hard cases and Ivan Churcher was certainly one of those. Churcher was a skilful crayfisher at Ngawi, but he is better remembered there as the rough and ready character who lived in a caravan, and who took perverse pleasure in irritating the more established identities in the village. Churcher had a pet pig which he had raised since capturing it in the wild. He named it Barry, so he could call for it loudly around Ngawi, preferably in the hearing of Barry Brough.

Barry, the pig, starred in one of the early telethons in Masterton. The pig was on stage and interest centred on guessing how many packets of wine biscuits Barry could consume at a sitting. Barry had a considerable appetite and an impressive 24 packets disappeared in hurry. At this point the pig sat back on his haunches, heaved a couple of times, and projectile vomited most of the biscuits across the stage.

After a time Churcher was encouraged to leave Ngawi and he set up camp with Barry in the Whakatomo River bed. Here, Churcher focussed his attentions on growing quantities of cannabis. To disguise his activities, he had picked up a number of old fishing baskets from Ngawi which he planted and hoisted up into the trees. Someone let the secret out and the police duly arrived to take an interest in Ivan Churcher's horticultural efforts. The baskets were pulled down and the Police photographer busied himself with his camera. "You'd better take a photo of me and the pig," Churcher suggested. Ivan held up the pig for the pose and fed Barry one of the cannabis plants as the incriminating photo was taken. When Churcher appeared in court on a charge of possession for sale, his lawyer seized on that photo and argued to the judge that it had special relevance as it indicated the real purpose of the plantings was simply to feed Barry's addiction. Apparently, the charges were dismissed, although it is not clear whether the court was convinced or had a sense of humour.

1960s. Darlene Nix recalls that, by the 1980s, the bus was so full children could not bring friends home to stay without making special arrangements. However, the problem of secondary education remained.

The general ambience of the settlement was not helped by the dumping of unwanted fish bait in the scrub near the village or leaving it exposed on the boats. It was a significant and continuing problem in the summer months. Visitors certainly knew they had arrived at a fishy place. At the end of the 1980s the Health Inspector was still noting that, while the larger fishing companies now had bait storage freezers, others were "too careless about the disposal of rotting fish"

There is nothing like shared isolation to build sense of community and inter-dependence. Nga residents understood from the beginning that if th did not help themselves there would be no help. early as January 1960, Bill Busch convened a meeti to set up a committee to "improve facilities". Under banner 'Ngawi Emergency Club', the nine membe focussed on procuring some First Aid and lifesavi equipment and exploring the possibility of a sm shed to house it. The names of his committee read a 'who's who' of early Ngawi identities. In 1962 D C