was Chairman and the committee included notables such as H Nation, W Busch, A Woolcott, B Whittaker, G Tilson, J Robertson, Mrs Ferguson, F Yule, F Clapcott. Minutes of the Emergency Club cease after 1963, perhaps indicating the Club was no longer operating in a formal sense, probably because the Tilsons on Ngawi Station were still the only permanent residents.

By the later 1970s the fishermen had arrived to stay, and interest in collective action for community improvement surfaced again. There were now 84 ratepayers in Ngawi itself. On 21 October 1978 most of them met in Murray Nix's woolshed to form the Ngawi Ratepayers Association (NRA). The Association's objectives were to promote the development of the Ngawi community and safeguard the interests of ratepayers and visitors. This would be partly achieved by "acting in an advisory capacity" to the Featherston County Council. Full membership was confined to the ratepayers although others could join as associate members. A committee of eight with Mike Sinclair the inaugural President was elected. An annual subscription of $10 single/ $15 a couple was set to provide a financial basis for Association activities. Aside from the years 1985-1987 when the name was temporarily changed to the 'Ngawi Progressive Association' in an attempt to broaden its membership, the Ratepayers Association has been the focus of community self-help ever since.

The minutes and newsletters of the Association give an insight into the role organisations such as this play in the lives of small communities. In 1981 the annual newsletter commented on tree planting to landscape the toilet area, the purchase of accessories for the fire engine, plans to start on a building to house the appliance which could only proceed on a step by step basis using voluntary labour which the readers would need to provide, the Woolshed Dance which had been a success but would have been more so if a storm had not kept many away, and plans to stage a major fishing competition to finance the fire station building. The newsletter concluded with a tactful reminder that subscriptions were now due and essential for the provision of further amenities.

Living at Ngawi was becoming easier and isolation diminishing. Nothing contributed to this more than the steady improvement in road communications. The fords were the big problem and all the locals had their stories. In 2011 Jack Priest of Whangaimoana described how he took on the property Kawakawa in the 1970s.

> "I had to get a State Advances loan and the bank manager chap in his suit and nice car came down to have a look at the place. When we got to the Kawakawa the river was quite high and he couldn't get his car across. So he got out and took off his shoes and socks and rolled his trousers right up. When he got across in his bare feet he said, 'Will the car be safe?' There was no one around for miles! So I said, 'Oh, I don't know. They're a bunch of thieves around here, mate.' So he waded all the way back and locked his car. His suit got pretty wet."
>
> "Another time I came down in the Landrover and we had some mattresses and gear on the back. The river was in flood but we got across in the Landrover alright but when we looked behind all the mattresses and stuff had washed off the back and disappeared."

One by one permanent bridges replaced the chancy fords. The Moikau at Whangaimoana was bridged in 1959, followed by the Washpool and Twin Creeks in 1962. The Hurupi was next in 1965 and in 1968 the bridge over the Putangirua Stream which flows past the Pinnacles was opened. The Kawakawa in 1972 and

the Paraki in 1974 followed, leaving the Waiwhero as the last obstacle. Despite this progress, at the beginning of the 1980s road access was still not good. In 1979 there were 25 days when Ngawi was cut off, in 1980 five, and in 1981 11 days when the Waiwhero could not be crossed. For Ngawi Packers, reliant on the road and working to a tight timetable to get fresh fish to the market it was a special problem. As late as 1983, floods and slips cut Ngawi Packers off for days, threatening shipments to Osaka and Singapore. Not surprisingly, the business supported representations to the Council to improve the situation. Barry Brough was an influential man, and his enthusiasm for the cause increased considerably after he had to carry his wife through waist deep water at 1.00 one morning in 1981 to escape his bogged vehicle. The school bus might not come for days – which probably frustrated parents more than their offspring. It was not just the bridges. In 1979 the Postmaster threatened to call off the rural delivery run if the Council did not improve the road surface, and the five times weekly service was temporarily reduced to two.

Finally, in 1985, the Waiwhero was bridged. However Blue Slip creek, which borders Ngawi on the north, flows through a bed too wide and constantly shifting to be spanned. Concrete culverts are in place to carry away floodwaters but the shingle and debris coming down the creek in times of flood can block the pipes. The resulting overflow still cuts access on occasions. Locals remember Elsie Hymers, retired to Mangatoetoe but a golf devotee, ignoring warnings and staggering across the flooded Blue Slip Creek with her clubs on her back, to be whisked away to her weekly game by a friend waiting on the other side. The tiny settlement of Mangatoetoe to the south has seen two bridges washed away and for some months a trip north began by wading the creek to get to vehicles left parked on the other side. Residents are waiting to see if the improved approaches to the new bridge will solve the problems of the past. Things are vastly better now, but the road will always be a potential problem.

As the trappings of civilisation solved one problem they created others. When the road improved, tourist numbers began to climb, and the dust problem increased. After the road along the foreshore was sealed in 1981 the dust problem was solved, but motorists were encouraged to increase their speed. Fearing accidents caused by speeding visitors, community concern switched to judder bars, speed limits, and warning signs. When the streets of the village itself were finally sealed, there were immediate problems with 'hoons' practising wheelies in the loose chip on the new sealing. Replacing the old baches and 'long drops' with nice houses with multiple bathrooms and flush toilets made life much more comfortable, but the problems of water supply and waste water disposal escalated. Perhaps most sadly, with easier access to the outside world and homes with deep freezers and a full range of labour saving devices, each household was more independent. The sharing and interdependence of residents so characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s diminished.

> "Everything changed when the power went through. Before, if somebody got some fish we all got some. The Tilsons would send milk over and Margaret Tilson always said, 'If you want some meat just tell Graham(Tilson).' When people got fridges and deep freezers there wasn't any need to share. It made a real difference. The power was lovely. It was lovely to have it, but you don't realise how it is going to change things." (Pat Carter 2010)

The focal point of the developing community was the Ngawi Fire Station. Acquiring some fire-fighting

IAN SUTHERLAND'S FISH

Stories of huge fish taken by recreational fishermen in Palliser Bay are legion but none surpass Ian Sutherland's big groper. This fish was not taken in the pre-World War Two glory days but in the early 1970s, soon after the Ngawi Packers factory was opened.

"My cousin, John Sutherland, was commercial fishing. He had a bach at Ngawi and I used to go and stay with him. On this particular occasion he was going out on his own and he said, 'You'll be O.K.?' and I said, 'Yes, I'll be alright.' I launched my boat (a 12 foot aluminium dinghy) and went westward to Hamenga Point. Fished there and I hooked something. It was a monstrous tug. I started winding it in and we had a fair old go. I thought I was going to lose it. Something was going to give. I hung on and hung on and hung on. Then it eased off. I wound up the slack and the next thing a big white belly popped up downstream – there was a tidal current running past. I could see I had a whopping groper. So I quietly wound him in. He was paravanning. He'd go one way in the current and then flick over and go the other. I thought, 'Christ, I hope I don't lose him!' I got him up beside the boat and managed to get the big long handled gaff into his mouth. Thought, 'I've got you, you big bugger!' I sat right back on the seat and I had a huge struggle to drag him over the gunwale but I got him in the end. That fish weighed 126 lb (56.25 kg), officially weighed on Barry Brough's scales at the factory. Not a guess. As far as I know it's the biggest one ever weighed in around there. Let them have it. Not much you can do with a fish like that." (Ian Sutherland October 2010)

equipment had been the first preoccupation of the Ratepayers Association – for good reason. Fire has always been a threat along a coast where winter floods are balanced by summer droughts. Days of warm, dry north-west winds bring the scrub to tinder point. In any case, the rudimentary construction of many of the early baches made them potential fiery death traps. With both the Martinborough and Featherston Fire Stations an hour's drive away, Ngawi residents needed to be able to save themselves.

In 1980 the newly formed Association acquired a fire trailer pump. The second-hand appliance was little more than a milk vat on a trailer with a pump on the back. Most of the cost was met by the Featherston County Council, but maintenance and running costs were to be met by the NRA. The new machinery was not ideal. While obviously anxious not to sound ungrateful for their assistance, a letter to the Featherston County Council on New Year's Day 1981, pointed out the trailer was prone to tip over when towed, the legs holding the tank in place were close to collapse, and the lack of baffles inside the tank added to the inherent instability. In 1982 a more functional, four-wheel drive, Land Rover fire tender was purchased and a fire station/first aid centre constructed. The fledgling fire brigade had its first outing shortly afterwards to deal with a bach fire in Ning Nong Bay and there was some satisfaction in having the blaze extinguished before the Martinborough brigade arrived. Bill Towler was the first Ngawi Fire Chief and Mike Sinclair chairman of the Ngawi Fire Party.

Obviously, the community needed the necessary equipment to fight fires, but the fire station has been

Opposite: A digger grooms the boat launching site on the morning of the annual Ngawi fishing competition.

Boat launching for the annual Ngawi Sports Fishing Competition is a busy operation. There is plenty of human interaction as this entry enters the water.

even more important in Ngawi's daily life as the social centre of the community. Until the station was built, the Lake Ferry Hotel had been the closest source of good cheer. It was well patronised despite being a long drive over a difficult road. With the growth of a permanent community with families, social activities were usually held in residents' homes. Apparently this was not all bad and some of the 'pot luck' teas are remembered as very festive events. The Ngawi fishing community was a very close one. Social gatherings were occasions for the 'permanents', those who lived and worked together during the week. Some of the bach families with a lengthy pedigree at Ngawi might be included, but the increasing weekend holiday home owners were still viewed as peripheral to the 'real' community.

Now the fire station brought a new dimension to social life. When the shelter to house the fire-fighting appliance was finished in 1982 it was a shed just big enough to house the engine, and residents had to move the vehicle outside if they wanted to hold functions. In 1987 the station was extended to provide a lounge and a first aid room. During the 1980s, when the permanent population was at its peak, Wednesday games nights with table tennis and indoor bowls, pot luck teas, the Xmas party, the tenth hole of the Hit-a-Round golf course, all took place on the fire station premises. Saturday nights at the Ngawi fire station became a Wairarapa institution.

To orchestrate activities the Ngawi Social Club was formed. Initially the Club operated a 'locker' system to obviate the need for a liquor license, but over time the club came to operate as the "well established bar" Senior Constable Wickens found when he came calling one Saturday night in 1989. Apparently the club had operated openly for nine years with the police "in complete ignorance of its activities". So the police said. There were about 40 people in the bar that night celebrating a birthday and they were not pleased to see the constable. When he closed the bar one or two of the more inebriated reacted with "enough indignation to abuse me verbally". However, Wickens also noted that the bar was well run, the attitude of David Sinclair, Club President, was responsible and co-operative, the books were carefully kept, revealing that all profits were directed into developing community assets, and there was "none of the seediness that goes with 'sly grogging'". He acknowledged that he "had no doubt the Club was a vital community asset".

For a brief interlude the Club closed while an application for a license was hastily organised. Since then the Ngawi Social Club has operated under a special license which allows it to be open between noon and midnight, seven days a week. The lack of demand, particularly as the permanent population has declined, reduces this to Saturday night and special occasions. Proceeds of the bar remain the key source of income to finance the improvements the NRA undertakes for Ngawi. Recently the premises were extended and improved further, making the Club a very comfortable place. In the winter it becomes a quiet refuge for a handful of permanents, but during the holiday season there are good times to be had at the Ngawi fire station.

At times less legal gatherings developed in sheds and garages as smaller groups looked for an opportunity to socialise more frequently and informally. In 1999 Messrs Boys, Thompson, Aislabie and Close found themselves reluctantly in the public eye with regard to their garage which was decked out with pool table, dart board, a powerful stereo which had led to the complaints, a deep fryer for chips, and a "safe and efficient" wood burner to heat the place. They ran a card system without money changing hands. In a *Wairarapa Times Age* news article on 24 July 1999 they

professed their innocence to accusations of noise and rowdiness, but there is an intriguing reference to missing street signs.

With recreation in mind, it seems unsurprising that a fishing community should have a Sports Fishing Club, but not every local was excited when this club was formed in July 1991, with Dave Robinson as president and Darlene Joyce secretary. There were only 20 original members. Others could not see the advantage of attracting more fishermen to compete for their resource. Some of them still don't. Undeterred, the club announced it would kick off its activities with a fishing competition on an ambitious scale. Over $30,000 worth of prizes were assembled from a variety of sponsors for the event to be held in January 1992. To boost publicity, a Mitsubishi car was on offer for the first large marlin to be caught. Since no marlin had ever been taken in Palliser Bay, the club believed they were on safe ground until the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries advised them that such a catch was actually a real possibility. Some expensive insurance cover was hastily acquired against the possibility of what would be very good, or very bad, luck depending on your view.

The initial competition was an unqualified success. The weather was perfect, a fluke in itself given the vagaries of the Ngawi climate, and contestants ignored the hoax phone call to a Wellington radio station announcing the event had been cancelled. Twenty-six boats and 98 anglers took part. In 1993 the number had climbed to 175, with boats coming from as far as Auckland. The competition was clearly established as a popular day on the sports fishing calendar. Today, participation approaches 500, and the scene of organised chaos on competition mornings as club members launch the boats is a spectator event in itself, especially if the sea is rough. Fishing is thirsty work so

Popular local identity, Ken Fenwick, at the keyboard. There were very few community projects at Ngawi where Fenwick did not take a leading role. (Photo: Hurndell.)

The Ngawi Hit A Round golf course. The backdrop to this nine hole links course makes it a wonderful place to play.

a large marquee supplements the amenities of the fire station to aid rehydration. For three days Ngawi is the place to be.

The nine hole Hit A Round Golf Links is Ngawi's second distinctive sporting amenity. It is another example of what can be achieved by practical people prepared to help themselves. The course came into being in 1984 on flat land bordering the sea and straddling the road onto Ngawi Station. The initiative and most of the early construction can be attributed to Bill Fenwick, Errol Tombs and Murray Nix. While Nix was still managing the station, the land was available free of charge. Today Ngawi land is leased by Kawakawa Station which subleases the golf course to the Ngawi Golf Club. Sheep are still grazed on the course, adding to the hazards. Along the western boundary of the course is the shoreline of Palliser Bay, and the views out to sea make playing the tidy little country course a special experience.

Not only does the course reflect hundreds, probably thousands, of hours of voluntary work, it is also a tribute to the resourcefulness of its creators. In the beginning the fairways were mown by a group of members using their home lawn mowers, marching around the course eight abreast. Constructing greens on stony ground without an accessible source of top soil was a problem. If you ever play the number five hole, remember as you do that Murray Nix and Errol Tombs would end their fishing day with a stint shovelling the loose material from the side of the road through an old wire wove bed frame to obtain the fine material to smooth the surface of the green. Working bees installed the watering systems on each green, using second hand gear from the Carterton Golf Club and literally miles of alkathene piping. There are 50 financial members today paying subscriptions of just $35. If this seems too much, a game at the Hit A Round costs just five

dollars. This is a true links course with not a tree in sight – which players can regret on days they have to sit down on the ground to avoid being bowled over by north-west gusts. If you cast an eye over the spread of the compact nine holes and comment that it seems pretty straightforward, locals will point out that you have forgotten about the rocks.

A cosy little harbour would have made Ngawi a very different place but, after the small anchorage at Te Kopi disappeared in the 1855 earthquake, there was no sheltered anchorage anywhere in Palliser Bay. Not surprisingly, this has exercised the minds of fishermen facing the difficulties of launching boats in rough conditions. In the late seventies, when the increasing number of boats accentuated the problem, the idea of constructing a sheltered anchorage with a boat ramp at Ngawi was investigated. This would allow recreational craft to be launched much more easily, and commercial vessels to be beached in protected water. A preliminary report from Truebridge Callender Beach and Co was pessimistic about the viability of the project, pointing out that, to contend with the prevailing conditions, any breakwater would need to be "of massive proportion". They also indicated that the effects of such a construction on the adjacent beaches would need to be carefully assessed, that the testing would cost in the vicinity of $10,000 and, until it was clear where the finance would come from for such a major project, this was not warranted. The plan also involved large scale excavation of foreshore land for the 100m by 40m marina. This was opposed by the Featherston County Council and Maori. Faced with the prospect of lengthy court action the scheme was abandoned and the NRA decided to let the idea lapse.

In 1993 the concept was revived in a plan submitted to the Wellington Regional Council for consideration as part of a regional coastal plan that was being drawn up. The new plan provided for a breakwater sheltering a 40 berth marina, a boat ramp, a permanent coastguard, a fuelling station, and car parking. Dave Robinson and Murray Nix, spokesmen for the plan, stressed the safety advantages such a refuge would create in Palliser. They also pointed to the benefits for Search and Rescue (SAR) operations, the possibility of clearing the beach of boats and trailers, and the attraction for recreational fishermen and sailors of a permanent fuel stop in the marina. This time the plan reached the feasibility stage. The study was commissioned by Dave Robinson, and carried out by Beca Carter Hollings and Ferner. The report, presented in January 1995, indicated the development was technically feasible subject to certain conditions.

The response from the community is an interesting comment on the nature of the tight little society of Ngawi. A 'working group' set up to evaluate the project was divided between those who were totally opposed, and those who had reservations. These reservations were expressed in a report prepared by Daryl Sykes on behalf of the group. Their concerns were partly economic. Beca Carter estimated the capital cost at between $2.5 and $3.0 million and it was questionable whether the returns from the marina would be adequate to compensate for an investment of this size. There was also a possible issue relating to the conditions of title for the foreshore land where the development would take place as this was designated Esplanade Reserve. It was not clear the District Council could assign the use and development of this land to a private developer. Above all, it became clear that the Ngawi community in general did not welcome the idea. The commercial fishing fleet was not keen to create a port facility attracting outside vessels and increasing the fishing pressure in the Bay. Neither was the community enthused by the prospect of higher visitor

Three stages in the evolution of Ngawi. Top left: about 1950; top right: early 1960s; bottom: today. (Photos: top left, Wairarapa Archive; top right, Wyeth.)

numbers and the environmental and social issues that would arise. They were also alarmed at the prospect of being rated to meet the capital cost, fearing other projects on the coast would suffer from the diversion of funds. Some were happy with the beach launching as it was, believing it brought stability to the numbers and type of vessel at Ngawi. At a time of rapid coastal development New Zealand wide, it was clear people at Ngawi in the 1990s liked Ngawi pretty much as it was, and they would forgo the possible advantages of development to keep it that way.

By then, the character of Ngawi had begun to change anyway. Things were becoming much more comfortable. The street sealing issue was finally resolved. In 1986 the total cost had been estimated at $94,000, more than $1,000 per ratepayer, and the FCC was adamant that the ratepayers in Ngawi would have to pay all of it, either through a special rate, a loan

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arrangement or cash payment. The bulk of residents decided that for that amount of money they could put up with a lot of dust, but by 1991 they had had enough, and agreed the streets should be sealed and they would contribute the balance to a subsidy offered by the SWDC from Transit roading allocations.

With the disappearance of the dust problem the water supply issue was eased as rainwater was less likely to be contaminated. Nevertheless, water was an increasing problem with the growing numbers and bigger houses. It still is. Some baches draw from springs at the base of the cliffs but these sources are inadequate for the whole community. A few drew water from shallow wells but as early as 1988 the FCC advised that all these wells were contaminated by septic tank seepage. It does not help that peak demand over January and February often coincides with drought conditions. So far the community has sidestepped the question of sewage disposal which has bedevilled other coastal communities, but the issue will eventually have to be addressed.

Telephone communications improved as new technology reached Ngawi. Until 1990 party lines were the order of the day, although the number of users on each line had reduced from five to three in 1983. 1990 saw the installation of a multi access radio network operating from a digital microwave radio terminal linking through a relay station at Lake Ferry. For older residents, it seemed a long way back to the 1960s and 1970s when the single 901 number on a line from Martinborough was the only connection. The new system with separate lines and underground cables, along with the parallel advent of cell phones, was a dramatic change. Cell phone coverage has remained unreliable both in terms of access from all the baches, and in its coverage out at sea, and commercial fishermen are quick to point out it is not an adequate form of safety communication for boats.

However, roading was still a problem, especially around the base of the Whatarangi bluffs. By the mid-1990s the cost to the South Wairarapa District Council of maintaining and improving the road to a better level was becoming prohibitive. In 1995 the Council appealed to Transit to have the road to Palliser designated a Special Purpose Road in light of rapidly increasing tourist traffic. This was a category designed to cater for roads which were important routes for users other than the local residents, who should not, therefore, be rated to maintain them. The first approach was declined. In the 1995/1996 financial year the SWDC spent over a million dollars on the road and Councillor Di Phelps warned that it might not be possible to maintain a two-way highway into the future. For the 1997/1998 financial year a rate increase of 3.8 percent had to be budgeted specifically to cover the projected costs of maintaining the Palliser Road. When residents understood they could be forced to fund the maintenance themselves it was a frightening prospect, and a number of houses and sections went up for sale in Ngawi at very reasonable prices.

The sealed highway and concrete bridges of today make the trip to Ngawi a short and comfortable drive.

A second representation to Transit Wellington in 1997 rescued the Council. Supported by evidence of rapidly increasing tourist traffic, the application was successful. Even here the residents recognised the need to help themselves. Transit had placed counters across the road to estimate vehicle traffic and some of the locals will now confess to devoting time to backing to and fro over them to boost numbers. As a Special Purpose Road, capital works were fully funded and the repairs and maintenance subsidised by Transit New Zealand and then, after 2008, by the New Zealand Transport Agency. This has allowed improvements well beyond the Council's resources. The road is now sealed through to Ngawi and substantial work has been carried out along the Whatarangi bluffs. With the constant threat of further erosion the classification brings some confidence that the road and bridges will be maintained into the future but the cost will be formidable. In 2012 the New Zealand Transport Authority budgeted almost $800,000 to protect the road.

However, none of these changes impacted on Ngawi as much as the introduction of Individual Transferable Quotas for the rock lobster fishery in 1990. The Ngawi fishing village had grown around a core of adventurous young men with nerve and energy but, in the beginning, little capital. Anyone who could afford to purchase a small aluminium boat could enter the industry. After 1990, if you had no quota you could not fish; the quota had been allocated to experienced fishermen with a long catch record. Quota could be bought but it was expensive. In 1991 crayfish quota sold for between $30,000 and $40,000 a tonne and a fisherman was required to hold at least three tonne before starting to fish. To add to the financial hurdle crayfish were not as abundant, and the boats required to fish successfully were larger and more expensive. Getting started at Ngawi now required substantial capital.

Consequently, many of the fishermen entering the new century were the same men who pioneered the industry in the 1970s and 1980s. If they were not still fishing they owned the boats, leasing their quota to younger men. Those with quota had the equity to buy more and quota concentrated in the hands of fewer men. By 2005 only eleven commercial boats were on the beach at Ngawi, in 2012 only nine. Meanwhile, the fishermen were becoming older and their lifestyle aspirations were changing. With children growing up and needing secondary education families contemplated a shift to centres such as Greytown and Featherston where access to high schools was easier and the amenities existed for a more comfortable lifestyle. The boats might still be on the Ngawi beach, but the owners commuted to use them. By 2012 only two boat owners still lived in the village.

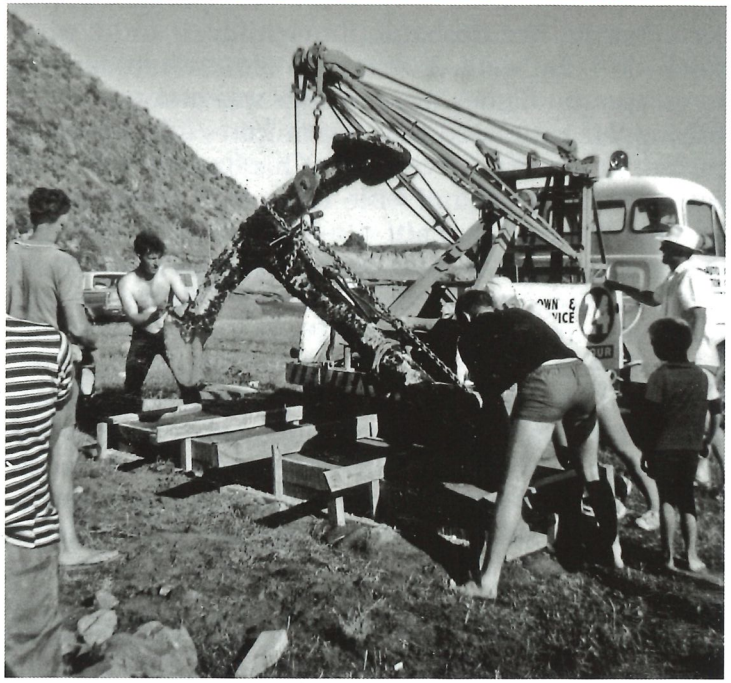
Ngawi, the fishing village, began to change into something else. The community which had developed through the 1970s and 1980s had been a working community. There were holiday homes and the few hardy souls who elected to retire to peace and quiet, but these were tolerated outsiders. Now the fishermen were moving out and a different breed was moving in. With demand for coastal property booming across the country, Ngawi was an attractive site, particularly if your bent for seaside recreation involved a boat and fishing. The price of property rose rapidly as the popularity of the village spread outside the Wairarapa, attracting interest from Wellington and even further afield. Sections had sold for £600 when the subdivision opened at Ngawi, and property values had remained low for some time, but in the early years of the 21st century any home of reasonable quality at Ngawi attracted a price tag in the hundreds of thousands. The

new arrivals were middle class people with money to spend on houses they would occupy only occasionally, and for leisure purposes. There were fewer commercial fishing vessels on the beach, but the actual number of boats rose dramatically as the 'weekenders' added their pleasure craft, some of them substantial vessels.

Today Ngawi is a holiday centre with a permanent population of only 25 to 30. The school bus does not run at all. On a normal working day the village is almost deserted, but at the weekends, and over the holiday season, it comes alive with the influx of home owners and campers, often with young families, and the village buzzes with people, dogs and four- wheel drive motorbikes. They still bring their own provisions. This is not the place to look for retail opportunities and the lack of permanent residents has torpedoed ventures such as the general store Murray Nix ran in the bottom storey of his house. The Top House Tea Garden closed its doors in 2008, and the small craft shop, run by volunteers in the basement, closed earlier. With improved road access it is even less likely that other ventures will begin.

Nevertheless, every now and again Ngawi finds itself in the news. With a largely absentee population the days are usually tranquil and uneventful but this is not always so. In a small, still isolated, community, located in a harsh physical environment with a workforce engaged in a high risk industry, there will always be occasional drama. Even with sealed roads and bridged rivers it is still an hour's drive to Martinborough or Featherston for fire and police services. Masterton Hospital is at least a half hour further and, although the rescue helicopter can slash emergency service times, this will only be true if the weather cooperates. Those who choose to live in Ngawi are philosophical about the problems. They are part of life, and the reaction of the community to them demonstrates their

Margaret Hurndell in part of the garden she created at her Ngawi home to disprove all the advice she received that it could not be done.



Mounting the anchor of the *Ben Avon* as a memorial at Ngawi; the ship was wrecked off Mangatoetoe Beach. (Photo: Wairarapa Archive.)

readiness to solve their own problems. Even those who holiday here seem to have chosen this place because they are in sympathy with the ambience of rugged self-sufficiency. When trouble comes the whole community still reacts with the same resourcefulness and capacity for independent action of the past.

The fire of 5 February 1990 was like that. Three Wellington youths, camped to the south of Ngawi on the Matakitaki Block, had almost extinguished their fire with dirt before they left their campsite but, when they looked back from their car, they saw the warm north-west breeze had fanned embers into a grass fire that was racing across the ground, already beyond control. The blaze consumed 400 hectares of land and destroyed three baches and a bus house before it was extinguished. With over 100 people camping in the area trapped, there were some desperate escapes. Josie Tutahi, her husband, four children and a nine-week old baby, walked or ran for almost half an hour to escape the flames. Noel Woods was lucky to be out fishing. He estimated that ten minutes after he saw a puff of smoke in the vicinity of his bach the fire had swept over it. Dick and Elsie Hymers of Mangatoetoe had the closest call of all.

> "It was the second year I was there and I was building my house. A guy came past yelling out, 'Fire at the lighthouse!' We scooted around with my son Ricky. It was 10.30 a.m. when we arrived and the smoke was so black and thick it was nearly dark. We were trying to save a caravan that a couple of fishermen and one of their partners lived in. They had a pretty interesting alternative lifestyle. They had a big old bath in full view in front of the caravan that they heated with a fire underneath to have their baths. There was a cow and they had painted 'COW' on its side so no one would think it was a deer and shoot it. They had a pig tethered to a stake by the caravan. We were beating the fire back with wet sacks and almost thought we had it contained and then the fire took off up the hill. The firemen told me that when it got to the top the wind caught it and fed it. We couldn't see a thing. The last I saw of Ricky he was trying to drag away that pig.
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> "The fire came back down so fast we were encircled before we knew it. My shoes were on fire and I was only wearing shorts and a shirt. I grabbed Elsie and we ran across the road to the two or three metre drop down onto the rocks. I kicked off the burning shoes. 'We've got to jump!' I yelled but Elsie kept saying, 'I can't! I can't!' so I grabbed her by the leg and threw myself over and pulled her down on top of me. I broke my leg but didn't know straight away. Elsie was unconscious. It was pitch dark now and the air was just black smoke and embers. We couldn't breathe. It was scary.
>
> "It seemed ages but was probably only seconds before Elsie came round. Looking along the ground we could just see the water and rocks and two dim figures coming. They carried Elsie down to the sea and I hobbled after. Still didn't know I had broken my leg. We got into the water among the rocks. The two guys were ex-firemen and they showed us how to keep our heads low and splash water into our faces to help get oxygen. Then we made our way through the water around the rocks. They half carried Elsie for a start but then had to carry me because my broken leg gave out completely. In the end I think I was the only serious casualty in the whole thing." (Dick Hymers 2012)

A desperate struggle took place to save the houses at the lighthouse. In the end, more than 100 firefighters,

including fire crews from Lake Ferry, Martinborough and Stokes Valley, plus two helicopters, were involved in subduing the bushfire. Every able-bodied resident played a role.

There was an aftermath. Local fire fighters were proud of their own gutsy effort, but recriminations were directed at the Masterton Fire Service which, to those facing the emergency, seemed to have been slow and unenthusiastic in providing help. Sorting through the communication problems behind this hopefully provided a basis for better cooperation in the future, but was another reminder to locals that their best solution was to save themselves. The cost of fighting the fire was estimated at $70,000. Since the fire had been lit in defiance of a total ban, the South Wairarapa District Council sought recompense from the youths at fault. They advised those with property damage to do likewise. Although Robin Fabish and Todd Mclay acknowledged starting the blaze their impecunious state made a significant contribution to damages unlikely.

In any case, the cost went beyond dollars. The fire had destroyed the vegetation which had provided shelter to campers for generations. Alarmed by what had happened, the Maori owners closed the area to future campers, ending a camping culture over half a century old. This in turn impacted on Ngawi itself, where the loss of the campers' custom contributed to Murray Nix's decision to close his store.

If they sniff the air for smoke in the summer Ngawi residents also look over their shoulders at the cliffs behind during the rains in winter. The bluffs provide some shelter from the southerlies sweeping northwards but they are a menace too. On the evening of 9 May 2008 Rob Mines of Seaview Avenue, Ngawi, was indoors out of the torrential rain, watching the rugby, when between 1,000 and 2,000 cubic metres of rock and mud broke free from a bluff above. The slip came down the gully, inundated his section with over a metre of sludge and boulders, and half buried his car in the carport. Three of his neighbours suffered the same fate and the street was piled high with spoil from the slip. There were no injuries or loss of life and the houses sat firm on their foundations. Contractors acted promptly to clear the road and the Earthquake Commission accepted damage claims. So, no harm done. The problem was, and still is, that a reconnaissance of the slopes above the town revealed there was plenty more where the first lot had come from, and large cracks in the soil indicated it could come at any time. On days when it rains heavily it is hard not to glance upwards.

But the sea is where you would expect Ngawi to draw its quota of excitement and tragedy. Palliser is notorious for shipwrecks. Ngawi fishermen go out day after day in small boats, often alone. They drop their pots on the very edge of the rocks the southerly swells crash against. And yet the casualty list is surprisingly

Noel Wood's bach was one of the casualties of the 1990 fire.

Palliser Bay is a dangerous place to fish. That is Dave Robinson's boat, top right, and the remains of Keith Banks *Tritoma*, bottom right. A larger, deep-water vessel provides the background. (Photos: background, Hurndell; top right, Luttrell; bottom right, Sims.)

Dave 'Robbies' boat immediately after it was dumped on the rocks. Robinson was not on board.

short. By 2012, there had been no fatalities among the commercial fishing fleet. Daryl Sykes, who fished from Ngawi in the 1970s and 1980s, and is now the spokesperson for the New Zealand Rock Lobster Industry Council, giving him an intimate knowledge of the crayfishing industry in New Zealand, believes this is because the Wairarapa fishermen are extremely good at what they do.

> "I think of people like Alistair Reed (East Coast). Seen him out on SAR operations in huge seas when you'd think no one would go out....Andrew Saville, a superb seaman and a superb fisherman....some guys just had the knack....someone like Bill Towler, one of the real highliners of the rock lobster fishery. Absolute demon. He would go out in 40 knots, 50 knots, even 60 knots. We'd go looking for him and we'd see this little jet boat banging its way in. ....Bob Buckley. There was nobody except Bill Towler, nobody, who could fish in close on the rocks like Bob Buckley. These guys were just really good." (Daryl Sykes 2010)

Sykes noted that Ngawi has been a training ground for many fishermen to go on to successful careers in other and deeper waters.

Nevertheless, fishing is a high risk occupation. The ACC rates it alongside aerial top-dressing when calculating levies. Most fishermen recall near misses, accidents and, in a few cases, disasters. Fishermen understand local conditions and if southerlies are howling or the wind is a gale from the north-west the boats stay home. But the pressure is always there to go out if you possibly can. Leaving pots unattended invites lost gear, and you are not making money sitting on shore.

In the early 1970s Murray Nix was safely ashore when the call came that a boat was presumed to have

gone down off Black Rock Point in 20 knot winds. It was Dave Robinson's *Pausabre* but this information was not passed on to to Nix. Robinson had been talking by radio to a boat in Wellington and his last words before going off air were ominous, "Hang on a minute – I'm taking water". There was no effective radio link between Wellington and Ngawi so the emergency call went to the lighthouse. The keeper rang Nix at the Ngawi homestead. His information was simply that there could be a boat in trouble and the approximate location. With speed critical, Nix and Dick Farrell went out in *Miss Penny*, a 13 foot 'yuppy ' run about. It was fast enough, but these were big seas for such a small boat. Battling out to the Point they could see a craft a long way off, well past the lighthouse. If that was the boat in difficulty, it was out of their reach.

However, little things can sometimes be the difference between life and death. Out of the corner of his eye Nix noticed a group of big groper buoys close in to the rocks and it flickered through his mind that it was an odd place to be setting lines. As he took a second look, a desperate waving hand appeared. Robinson and his crew man, Keith Williams, had used the buoys to stay afloat. There was no sign of the *Pausabre*. Still under the impression they were rescuing Italian fishermen from Wellington, they heaved Dave Robinson on board. He was too exhausted to recognize his rescuers and in such bad shape they didn't immediately recognise him either. He had been hanging on for over half an hour and was on the verge of letting go. Keith Williams was hardly in any better condition and it was only when they dragged him in that Nix and Farrell realised they had rescued their friends and neighbours.

Although the trend has been towards bigger boats and deeper waters crayfishing is still an inshore fishery. At times the boats come close to the rocks to retrieve pots. This requires skilful boat handling in calm conditions, but a southerly swell is a recipe for trouble. It is all a matter of timing to get in and out between the extra large sets of swells which materialise every fifteen to thirty minutes. Keith Banks, who has fished from Ngawi for almost twenty years, remembers the day he didn't get it right. Lance Phelps, crewman, and the NIWA scientist on board the *Tritoma* to monitor the catch, will remember it too.

In close by the rocks under Palliser lighthouse, with just one more pot to retrieve, Keith glanced behind and saw a large swell rising behind them. There was just time to shout a warning before the swell crashed over the back of the *Tritoma*, filling it with water. Still afloat, with the engine running, Banks opened the throttles and tried to swing around head on to the next wave. They might have made it if the weight of water in the cock pit had not made the boat sluggish. Instead, they were still broadside on when the next swell flipped the boat over. Phelps and the scientist were thrown off the back, but Banks was up in the cabin, now standing on the steering wheel with his head up to the floor, breathing from a small air pocket. He had to get out, but this was August and he was wearing the full winter outfit: beanie, coat, leggings and gumboots. None of that would help him swim. Looking upwards he saw the hatch over the fish hold had come off and there was space and air above. Banks heaved himself up. He was safe for a moment, with air and time to take off heavy clothing.

Meanwhile, the other two had made it to the beach and were looking anxiously for any sign of the skipper, while Banks was peering down into the debris which was trying to float up into the hold, wondering if he could dive through it. A shuddering crash indicated the boat had hit the rocks, tearing off the wheel house. Sucking a breath, he dived down, pushing through the

Keith Banks standing by the wreckage of the *Tritoma* as he explains to locals and journalists exactly how the accident happened.

rubbish to reach the handrail, and hauling himself under it. Suddenly, he was out, in water shallow enough to walk ashore. He was not going to be able to keep this one quiet! By now other boats were on the way to help and the rescue helicopter was in the air. He maintains he was a careful seaman before, but Keith Banks looks even harder for those dangerous swells now.

Even if the weather is good there is always the chance of mechanical accidents. Lifting pots in confined space on a rocking boat takes balance, quick reactions and constant vigilance. When his apron caught in a pot as it was lowered, Kevin Feast's deckhand, Shane Churcher, went over the side with the pot dragging him down so deep that he later related the light went dark. When Feast turned around he was gone. In the desperate minutes that followed, he hauled his mate up from the depths, hand over hand. It was a huge effort by a man with a cardiac condition and, by the time he had dragged the deckhand aboard, he was experiencing a heart attack. Both survived.

In the end it was not the fishing, natural disasters or boat wrecks, that has made Ngawi a household name in the twenty-first century, although the community's isolation did contribute. Law and order services are just as far from Ngawi as fire brigades and emergency medical services. Sunday, 17 September 2006 was a stormy night at Ngawi, with strong southerly winds and a heavy swell crashing into the bay, when three teenagers, Owen Guthrie 19, Joshua Diamond 19 and Brendon Taylor 15, drove into the village in a stolen car. Already on bail for burglary, assault, and involvement with car theft, Guthrie was familiar with the area, having stayed there with relatives. It is likely the group had been involved with burglary and car conversion at Ngawi only a few days earlier. That night they had already burgled a Lake Ferry home of alcohol and meat. At Ngawi they broke into a vacant home drank the alcohol they found, and then vandalised the place. Emerging to burgle further baches, they were heard by Mrs Evelyn Kingi who called a neighbour and then the police.

As the police would be a while in coming, two Ngawi men, one with a shotgun, tried to ensure the burglars would not escape by blocking the road out of town with their vehicle. When the intruders breached the blockade and headed north the gun was fired and the were pursued by the two locals. There is only one road out and a phone call had already gone ahead to set up another road block at the Whatarangi bluffs. When the pursuing ute caught and overtook the teenagers' car', 'nudging' it as they passed, more shots were fired this time at the car's tires and boot.

Cut off, the youths turned, fled back to Ngawi and hid the car in an empty garage and themselves in the

djoining bach. Police had now arrived and were trying o sort out what was happening when residents noticed light in a bach they knew should be vacant, and confronted the intruders who fled out of windows and up the hill. One hid in the bush close by, but the other wo scrambled as high as they could until they were rapped in the head of a steep gully. When dawn came few of the younger fishermen clambered up the hill, spotted the miscreants, and commenced rolling stones down on them. One of the youths was slightly injured on the hand as both sides hurled abuse at each other. Eventually the two gave up and were brought down the hill with a good deal of abuse and some jostling along he way. At the bottom they surrendered to the police, s did the third member of the group who came out of iding. He later commented that he didn't want to be aught, but he was a lot happier to be in the hands of he police than the locals.

It was a good story and the national papers seized n it. There was little sympathy for the teenagers nd, initially, a good deal of admiration for the eaction of the locals. "Teens Get a Taste of Village ustice" headlined the *Herald On Sunday* on 8 October. arth Gadsby, the 59 year-old fisherman who fired he shotgun, was nicknamed the 'Sheriff of Ngawi' nd seen as a local hero. But the mood changed as eople reflected on the implications of individuals nforcing their own law from the business end of a hotgun. On Friday, 22 September the *Wairarapa Times ge* considered the appropriateness of "Lynch Mob" ccusations. Gadsby faced firearm charges and the rown Prosecutor labelled him a "vigilante" in court.

The Ngawi community closed ranks behind their an. Some conceded that the shotgun was a step too r, but they all sympathised with the provocation. isiting media in search of their copy found the locals ry reluctant to discuss the incident with outsiders. A fund of just under $9,000 dollars was raised by Ngawi and Lake Ferry residents to assist Gadsby with his legal costs. When his case came to the High Court in Wellington on 7 April 2008 Gadsby was found guilty of recklessly discharging a fire arm, fined $3,000 and ordered to surrender the offending shotgun. His firearms license was revoked on the grounds that he "was not a fit and proper" person to own one. It was not a popular judgement in Ngawi. In a postscript to the question of the license, Gadsby appealed twice against the revocation and on 11 May 2012 the Masterton District Court found in his favour. Gadsby expressed his intention to go duck shooting later that day.

Where to now for the little fishing settlement? The notoriety of the 'sheriff' has made Ngawi a familiar name. The houses are bigger, smarter and more expensive. But if Ngawi today is different it still clings to an ethos of independence, self-sufficiency and capacity for action. Bill Busch would be flummoxed by the affluent village which has replaced his lonely bach. Harry Stewart would think of his rowboat as he admired the aluminium hulks of today's fishing fleet. Margaret Tilson would recollect her weeks of isolation if she could view the sealed two-way highway heading north across concrete bridges. But when the need arises, the people of this community still come together to solve their own problems. And, above all else, as true as it ever was, they come to Ngawi to fish.