

# Maungatua Contracting



Terraces Irrigation Ltd shareholders and friends join for a toast as work on the reservoir begins to take shape. They are (from left) Debbie Jolly, Doreen Still, Ben Jolly, Pete Jolly, Robbie Gibson, Chrissy Stevenson, Cliff Still, Ben Purvis, Lesley Purvis, Sam Purvis and Simon Maling. (Mr and Mrs Still, now retired, worked for the Gibson family for 64 years.)

## Irrigation has 'futureproofed' four Tarras properties

FOR decades, the Tarras farming community has strived to get more water into that drought-prone area, and, with the completion late last year of the Terraces Irrigation Scheme, a dream has been realised for four properties.

First mooted nine years ago, various schemes had reached the drawing-board stage before a small group of pastoral farmers made the decision to go out on their own, and Terraces Irrigation Ltd was formed.

Those involved in the scheme, which is privately owned and privately funded and has the capacity to irrigate 1700 hectares, are Peter Jolly, of Kotiti; Robert Gibson, of Malvern Downs; the Purvis family, of Cluden; and Simon Maling, of Lindis Peaks. The properties all bound the Tarras township. In fact, the Tarras Golf

Course has been built through three of the four! "The ball began to roll and we gathered momentum," said Pete Jolly, spokesman for the group, who pointed out that the reality is that without water, farmers will continue to have no options other than to remain traditional dry-land Central Otago pastoral farmers, reliant on sheep and beef.

"But now the options — and they are many and varied — are there. Two properties have already gone into dairy support as a result of the project and at Kotiti we've started growing grain. We planted 80 hectares this autumn and will put more in in the spring. It's a matter of just seeing how things go."

Other viable options irrigation brings include the raising of young dairy calves, viticulture and various forms of horticulture, given the area's number of annual growing degree days or GDDs (900-1100).

The growing of specialty seeds, which need a quarantine area around them, is yet another possible avenue. But it is not only the diversity that irrigation brings, but also the ability to have one crop harvested and another one in the ground and growing almost immediately.

And a reliable water supply is, indeed, enough in itself. "This autumn would have been drastic without the scheme given the extreme drought conditions,"

Mr Jolly remarked. And the design of the Maungatua Contracting project has helped that reliability.

"One of its main features is that the water pumped to the pond (reservoir) is from bores adjacent to the Clutha River. This means that, although there was a little more expense, there is no surface water involved, minimising the risk into the future of the pumps being disrupted by sediment, didimo and flooding. It also means a longer life for the pumps."

Among the reasons Maungatua Contracting was approached by Terraces Irrigation Ltd was because it is well known that they are very good operators, completing projects to a high standard.

"We had to be confident that it would work," Mr Jolly said with smile.

From the outset, the relationship between client and contractor was excellent, and while the construction work went ahead, the farmers, in turn, put their individual irrigation systems in place on their respective properties.

Mr Jolly also pointed to the lack of any impact on the environment. At the river, all that can be seen is some pipework at the manifolds and three small sheds housing the electronics and other equipment. At the reservoir, there are three pump-sheds and on the farms there are booster pump-sheds.

"And all sheds are even 'colour-co-ordinated' a light green to blend with the landscape," he added.

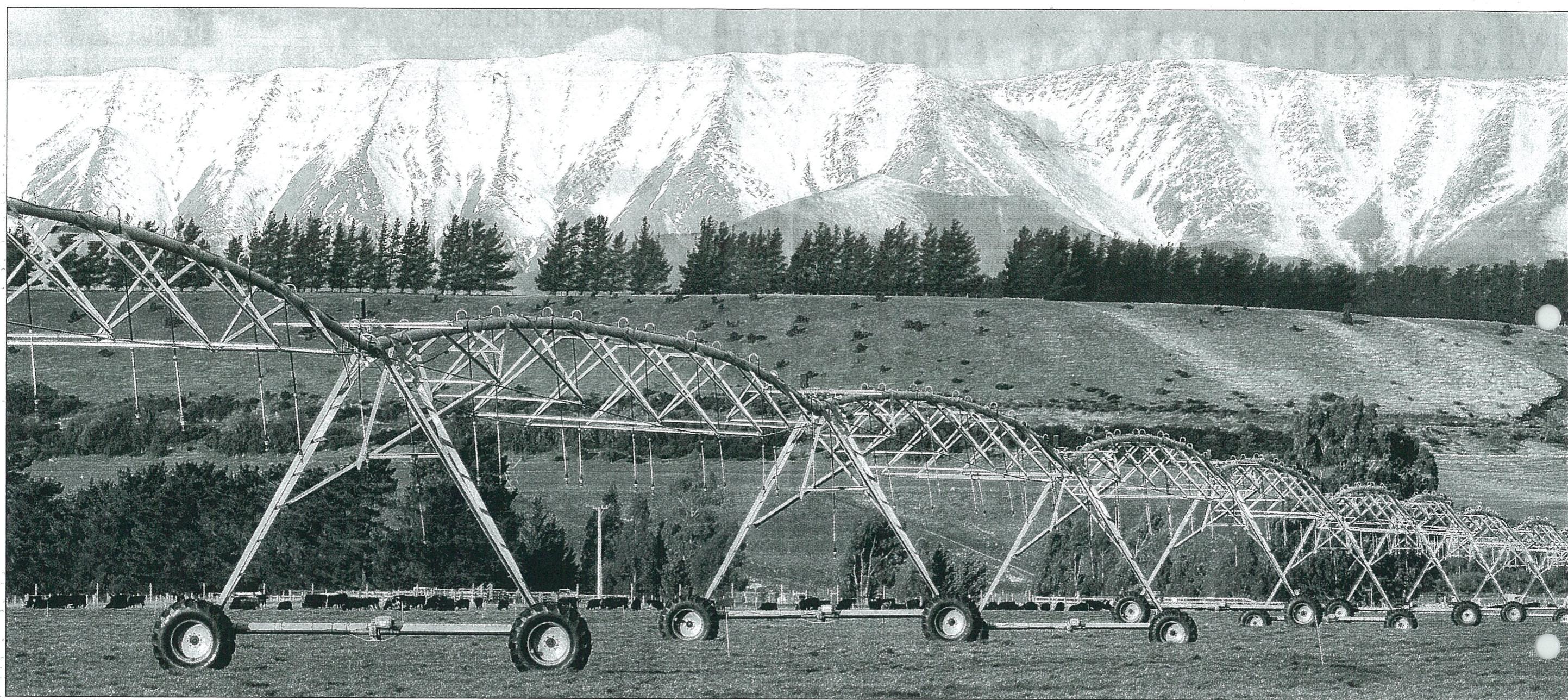
But, for Terraces Irrigation Ltd, the most important aspects are that they can now "make it rain" and diversify — and their properties are "futureproofed".



Above: An early stage in the reservoir's construction.



Above: Later in its construction, the reservoir's contours are well defined.



Water mover . . . An irrigation pivot at Maori Point Rd, near Tarras, with the St Bathans Range in the background.

PHOTOS: MARK PRICE

&gt;Wanaka

# Planning for the future

By MARK PRICE

TARRAS farmers are not letting the grass grow under their feet when it comes to securing future supplies of water for irrigation. An Otago Regional Council plan change (plan change 5A) that would reduce the availability of irrigation water from a traditional source — the Lindis River — is looming.

And, while Tarras farmers who rely on that source are expected to argue about the extent of the change, many are already busy building irrigation schemes to take water from other sources — primarily the Clutha River.

John Morrison grows 50,000 peony plants on his property in the Ardgour Valley part of the Tarras district.

He and six other farmers are installing a 5km pipeline from a borefield on

the banks of the Clutha River to carry 300 litres of water per second to a total of 600ha.

Mr Morrison describes the scheme he and the other shareholders are building as "small fry".

It is, nevertheless, costing \$2 million.

The water is due to begin flowing next month.

Mr Morrison says a secure summer water supply will make his current operation more productive, but the big advantage will be getting a supply to previously unirrigated land that would



Pete Jolly



John Morrison

suit new vineyards.

Tarras farmer and Terraces Irrigation Ltd shareholder Pete Jolly also sees viticultural or horticultural potential for the dry terraces and hills he and three other farmers will begin irrigating this summer for the first time.

While he describes himself as a "bit of a traditionalist" who is unlikely to be the one who plants a cherry or nectarine orchard, he sees the scheme

giving Tarras farmers of the future options beyond sheep. "With water we've got alternatives; without water, we've got

none."

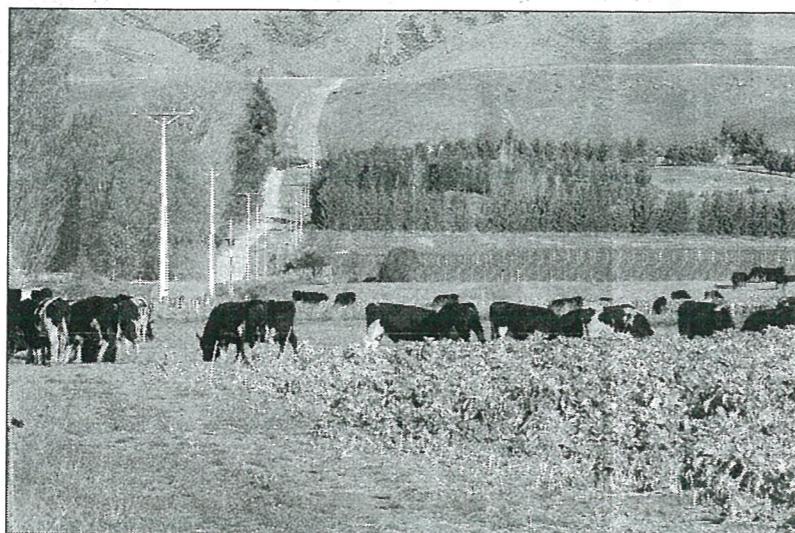
The scheme supplies up to 716 litres per second of Clutha River water to 1700ha not already irrigated by water from the Lindis.

While recognising the Lindis supply was "contentious", given the council's plan change, Mr Jolly said he would be "sticking with the Lindis for as long as we can".

Mr Jolly was chairman of Tarras Water Ltd, the company



Digging in . . . Pipes were being installed this week to carry water from a bore field near the Clutha River to the Ardgour Valley, Tarras (below).



set up to build a \$36 million scheme to irrigate 6000ha using water from the Clutha River.

That scheme did not get off

the ground.

The new scheme was a "totally different concept", Mr Jolly said, but had "salvaged

something out of nothing".

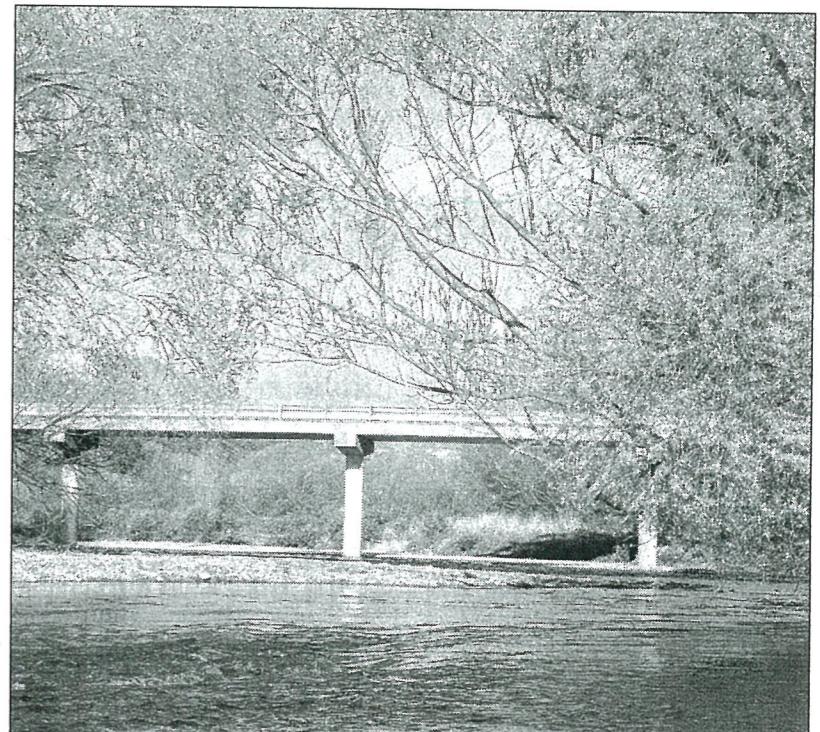
It was a work in progress, although its main feature, a huge storage dam just north of Tarras township, was in operation.

Mr Jolly said he had put in "a heap of pivots" on his own farm, and he listed four or five other farmers who had been involved with the Tarras Water Ltd scheme who were now developing their own irrigation systems.

"So a lot of that ground that TWL was going to irrigate will ultimately be irrigated, but not all of it."

Later this month, the regional council is expected to release public submissions on the Lindis River plan change 5A, which will set minimum flow levels for the river and place limits on how much water can be taken from its associated aquifer.

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Going with the flow . . . The Lindis River has a good flow in spring, but is likely to dry up at the height of the summer. Below: Terraces Irrigation Ltd's storage pond, at Tarras.

