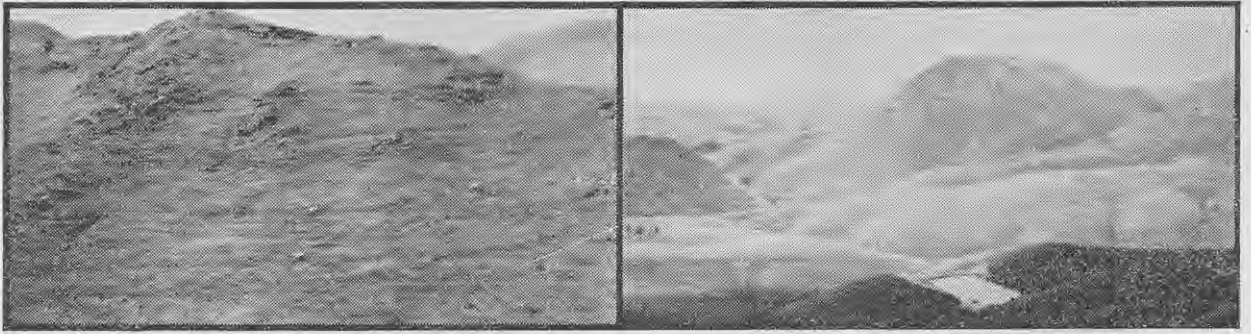


FARMING ON DANTHONIA HILL COUNTRY



The pasture illustrated on the left is dominantly *Danthonia pilosa*, which provides grazing all the year round. The conformation of the country in the right-hand illustration is typical of that of the danthonia hills of Hawkes Bay.

A fifth mob consists of mixed-aged ewes which either were dry the preceding season or failed to rear their lambs. Should they fail a second time, they are sold as fats. In addition to the ewes, 700 to 800 ewe hoggets are grazed in two mobs.

Romney rams, in the proportion of 3 to 100 ewes, are turned out with all the older sheep in the mobs on February 12. The 2-tooth ewes are not mated to the rams until 10 days later so that any which lose their lambs may have them replaced from twins among the other mobs. After the rams are turned out ewes are mustered every second day and sometimes held in a small holding paddock.

Three paddocks are provided for each mob from February 12, and every fourth day the mob is moved; the number of days may vary slightly according to the size of the paddock, but a mob is never left in one paddock for more than 5 days or fewer than 3 days. This routine has been carried on for a number of years and has worked well. The sheep muster very easily—one bark from a dog is sufficient to start them moving—and the changes continue until lambing time in July. In the middle of July the mobs are sorted up, ewes closest to lambing being sent to the earliest sunny paddock; as they lamb, they are shedded on to the flat paddocks and more ewes are brought in from the hills to take their places. Eventually all the steeper hills on which the ewes had been running are bare of sheep except for ewes which have no lambs. All ewes with twin lambs are drafted out into one paddock, and from this mob twins are separated and one given to every 2-tooth ewe which has lost her lamb.

Ewe and Wether Lambs Separated

About the middle of August, when all ewes have lambed and the flats and lower hill paddocks are fully stocked, docking is begun. As soon as the lambs have recovered from docking a number are run through the race and drafted into pens with netting sides—the ewe lambs on one side, the wether lambs on the other. The number so drafted never exceeds 120, as this number has been found to be the maximum that can be handled

for remothering. The mothers are then allowed to approach the fence, and running each mob of lambs away with their mothers is quite simple. This operation is repeated until the whole mob of ewes and lambs is divided into two—those with ewe lambs and those with wether lambs. To get the wether lambs away fat as early as possible they are placed with their mothers on the best paddocks. Until this practice was adopted very few milk lambs were sold fat off their mothers.

From then on the sheep are set stocked until weaning time—about December 15. The first draft of fat lambs is taken about November 25 and a second draft some 3 weeks later. The balance of the wether lambs almost always are sold in the yards before Christmas.

After being weaned the ewe lambs—the only lambs kept—are drenched for parasites and placed in paddocks which have been saved for them; drenching is repeated in January and February. In February younger ewes are inoculated against black disease. Each ewe is inoculated twice in her life, once as a 2-tooth and once as a 4-tooth.

Culling

In October hoggets are mustered and a percentage culled on wool; the remainder are then shorn and culled for frame, the culls being sold with the cull ewes in January. In this way the hogget mob is reduced by between 150 and 200, only the best being retained for breeding.

Ewes are culled in January. No 5-year-old ewes are kept, and a percentage of 4-tooths are culled on constitution. On this type of country there is always a percentage of young ewes which show a weakness in constitution after rearing a lamb. All cull sheep are sold in January.

The ewe lambs are carried through to the stage when, as 2-tooths, they replace cast ewes. They are given the best paddocks and from June to August are fed pumpkins or kale grown on the flats. Some 700 ewe hoggets are kept through and only

the best are fed pumpkins; the weaker ones are turned on to kale in April or May for a few weeks, then on to grass and kale a fortnight at a time until the kale is finished in October. The main mob of hoggets is run on the danthonia hills after the pumpkins are finished.

Cropping is not a very big item on the property, as little suitable land is available, but an endeavour is made always to have some supplementary feed for the poorer hoggets.

Ewes are crutched in February, before the rams are turned out, and again at the end of May. The average lambing percentage is 90.

Cattle

Cattle are carried to keep the pastures in order, and at the same time are quite profitable. A mob of 120 head is always run, 40 weaner steers being bought in each year and the same number of grown steers sold off. From February to June they are usually run in one mob to clean up all rank, dry growth of danthonia, an endeavour being made to have all country clean by June and closely grazed by sheep before the spring growth comes away.

The cattle are kept away from all paddocks containing ewes just before and during lambing, but later they are spread over all paddocks as the feed requires. In exceptional seasons when the usual number of cattle is insufficient to control the growth of grass, additional cattle are brought in to graze. The main growth of danthonia takes place after the first autumn rains and in early November, and danthonia pastures are at their best when grazed closely.

Under suitable management this class of country, though carrying no subterranean clover and not topdressed, mainly because of the topography, may be farmed satisfactorily with a minimum of labour and outlay, but it is essential that the farmer should know his business. The labour to run this property is provided by the farmer and a lad. Only for major works is outside labour employed.