



HIGH COUNTRY RUN

JUST OVER 12 per cent. of New Zealand is high-country tussock land in the South Island. Between the eastern plains and the perpetual snows of the Southern Alps it sprawls southwards, from Marlborough to Southland. It is a land of glacier-gnawed valleys scoured by fierce mountain-torrents. It is a land of hills and gorges, spurs and shingle slopes, hanging valleys and river flats, across which sweep the north-west winds.

To these tussock grasslands came early immigrant farmers. With English matches, they set ablaze the age-old tussocks, the tangled beech forests. They brought Australian Merinos, with Scots shepherds and sheep-dogs to tend them.

To-day, almost 2,000,000 sheep graze upon these 7,700,000 mountainous acres. The Crown, the largest owner of all, leases 545 runs, each one averaging over 14,000 acres. Of the flocks (mostly crossbreds, including the Merino strain) at least nine contain more than 20,000 sheep.

But as far back as 1920 a Government Commission gave warning that these mountain farms, far from progressing, had "gone backward . . . a state of affairs not at all creditable to the Dominion."

What's the reason for this? Why is the future doubtful for tussock grasslands? A detailed survey, covering grazing and farm economy at one high country run, endeavours to answer these questions.

Rough roads, often mere tracks, wind laboriously to most high-country farms, but the Grasmere - Cora Lynn run, set in the Waimakariri Basin, is linked to Canterbury and Westland both by trans-alpine railroad and main highway. Cora Lynn, administered by the Lands Department, and Grasmere, an educational grant controlled by the Canterbury University Council, total almost 54,000 acres. The two stations are worked as one enormous unit. Over 90 per cent. of the unit is divided into fifteen grazing blocks, nine of which range from 700 to 10,000 acres.

Four distinct types of country are found in this area—river-bed shingle, alluvial fans, steep slopes worn by glaciers, and, lastly, mountain tops with shingle slides and bare rock. The weather and climate varies widely, depending on slope, aspect, height above sea-level, and the amount of bare rock.

Frequent frosts, temperatures as erratic as the nor'west rains, a late spring, hot dry winds, fierce, sudden summer rains