

## Early horseracing on Chatham Island



Thomas Ritchie on Tapiri Moko, winner of the first Hurdle Race in 1866



The first grandstand, built in the early 1900s



The raceday crowd in 1908



Ned Fraser leading the jump in front of the new grandstand



The first horse races on Chatham Islands were held on 1 January 1866 on the lake flats at Hapupu. They were organized by Thomas Ritchie and William Hunt.

Thomas Ritchie, a Northern Irishman, came to the Chathams in in early 1864 and took up land at Okawa where he grew vegetables and raised cattle for sale to visiting ships. William Hunt was the son of Frederick Hunt who was well-established on Pitt Island providing produce to visiting whalers. Both men were keen horsemen and the races provided competition and entertainment to all.

The first horses on Chatham Island were sent down in the 1840s by the New Zealand and in the mid-1850s many breeding mares were imported from Sydney by the Maori in payment for their potato crops. It was estimated that by 1861 there were near 500 horses on the island and some six years later the Maori were reported as having had about 1000 horses. Many of the early horses were said to be thoroughbreds so there were plenty to choose from for horseracing.

At the end of 1866 the races were held on Waitangi Beach and the local correspondent reported: ‘The 27th was the day of our races, and it was altogether one of the most brilliantly successful gatherings ever held. Such an assemblage of horses, as regards either number or quality was never before seen on the Chatham racecourse. Over the next few years race and sports days were held at both Kaingaroa and Waitangi, the latter on the beach and at Whangamarino. They became very popular and were attended not only by men but also by the womenfolk, the Hawke’s Bay Herald correspondent reporting, ‘On the 10th December our Kaingaroa Races came off with considerable éclat. The weather was most propitious and visitors gathered together from every part of the island; and to add to the general pleasure, a large number of fair ladies honoured us with their presence.’

The Chatham Islands Jockey Club was established and officially registered in New Zealand by Thomas Ritchie in 1873. It is the second registered Racing Club, the first being Auckland Racing Club. The first races under the registered title of Chatham Islands Jockey Club were held in 1874.

Initially seats were erected for the spectators and sails used to provide shade overhead. Hurdles comprised forked posts driven into the ground with rails laid across them. By the early 1900s the first grandstand was built and within a few years doubled in size. Today it is part of the Norman Kirk Memorial Reserve’s building.