

Water the lifeblood of 'Tarwyn Park'

THE name, "Tarwyn Park", is associated in the minds of many older Australians with thoroughbred horses, but today it's a name cited in top-level scientific circles for other important reasons.

Now owned by the Andrews family, the property has become a de facto farm-scale demonstration site for one man's revolutionary approach to landscape management.

Tarwyn Park is the historic stud property in the Upper Bylong Valley made famous in the 1930s and '40s by Herbert Thompson, the legendary thoroughbred breeder.

Purchased from the Lee estate about 1918, it became the headquarters of Thompson's three-pronged stud empire, which also included "Oakleigh" in the Widden Valley and "Sunnyside" at Bylong.

At the height of his success, Thompson's studs dominated the Sydney racing scene, in one year alone accounting for 100 of the 522 lots offered at Sydney yearling sales.

Among his stallions was Heroic, which stood at Tarwyn Park from 1927 to 1939 and sired a string of champions, including the Melbourne Cup winner, Hall Mark.

Other notable horses bred at Tarwyn Park included Hua, Persist, Feminist, Golden Chariot (dam of Wenona Girl), Pushover, Lindberg and Nuffield.

It was even said that Herbert Thompson bred more winners of major races during the first half of last century than any other Australian thoroughbred breeder.

He died in 1955 and Tarwyn Park was sold, although it continued to be worked as a thoroughbred stud by subsequent owners.

In 1975 it was bought by Peter and Anne Andrews, who moved from their small stud farm on the Gawler River in South Australia, attracted by the idea of more reliable water.

Among their line-up of stallions was the famous Rain Lover, winner of back-to-back Melbourne Cups in 1968 and 1969.

While they had modest success with the

stud, it's been Peter's achievements over the past 20 years in land and water conservation that have thrust Tarwyn Park into the spotlight.

Peter developed a landscape management system he calls "natural farming sequence" (NFS) to rehabilitate degraded land and restore what he sees as the natural balance between land and water.

The system is based on moving water back to where it was before European settlement, using a combination of keen observation and application of simple hydrological principles.

On Tarwyn Park flood run-off is diverted by contour banks on to strategic floodplain sites. The result is a virtual year-round natural self-irrigation system, providing productive (and unfertilised) pastures of green fodder even when the surrounding country is in the grip of drought.

Other benefits claimed for the NFS approach are erosion benefits, reduced deep drainage and salinisation, improved soil structure and a greater build-up of organic mulch.

Since reports of Peter Andrew's work started to attract publicity about two years ago, a procession of scientists, agency officials, academics and politicians has beaten a path to Tarwyn Park to see the results at first hand.

Scientists broadly agree the system has "worked" at Tarwyn Park, but they say further study is needed across a range of sites before wider conclusions can be drawn.

However, no further study was needed to convince retail magnate Gerry Harvey, owner of Baramul stud, of the worth of NFS, and Peter now lives at "Baramul" full-time while he works his

■ **LEFT:** Stuart Andrews in a lush NFS pasture on Tarwyn Park.



■ Stuart Andrews' mother and son in front of the original sandstone homestead.

magic with the property's water flows.

Tarwyn Park, meanwhile, is being managed by Peter's son, Stuart, who lives with his schoolteacher wife, Megan, and their two young sons in the 1930s homestead built for Herbert Thompson.

About 100 metres across the paddock stands a reminder of the property's stud glory days, in the shape of the original 1920s stone stable block, timber barns and a round yard.

Under Stuart's management, the 600ha property has undergone a production shift from horses to cattle and is now set up for cell grazing with a target stocking rate of around 600 young steers.

"We were breeding before, but the cows always got too fat," he said.

"Running steers also gives us more flexibility to lighten off at any time when the season gets tight."



The race for mice and men

NEXT March, as with every year, the tiny, one-shop village of Bylong will be over-run

Held on the sports ground opposite the store, the mice races have become an



Peter Austin
Land 30/12/04