

[Page 1]

For Andrew Anderson

Awhea (?)  
 Martinborough  
 Wellington NZ  
 February 19<sup>th</sup> 1895

My dear old friend

I once again write you although an answer to my last letter did not arrive yet but I hope it is on the way coming somewhere. However I am glad to say this leaves me in the best of health & I hope this will find you all enjoying such a privilege. Now in my last letter I only gave you a slight sketch of my voyage & I reserved until another time my opinion of N Zealand. Well I suppose I must now endeavour to give you some news of my adopted land but it is a puzzle to me to know what or where to begin. One object would be enough for me to give a description of. I think I may say I have formed my opinion on almost everything now. Well if I did it was with a bit of hard sounding(?). Well first of all I will begin with the climate which suits me much better now. It is very hot here in summer (of course I have only seen the summer yet). We get weeks & months of a hot burning sun without a spec of a cloud to be seen only a clear blue sky so the heat is most intense but not so oppressive as you would think.

[Page 2]

The grass burns almost quite away but that only happens on the hard stony ground. The creeks dry up except the half sized rivers. I seen myself going a mile to a creek to get a drink & when I got there found nothing but dry stones. I often got disappointed in that way, how I wished I had Dunie burn if it was 5 miles away I would not care. Now when water comes into these creeks they are exceedingly pretty just like rivers of milk. It would not do for anyone to be so particular about the water being clean. I often took it up in my handkerchief & squeezed it through or rather sucked it out of my handkerchief glad to get it if it was wet although it would be as hot as tea. But you must not think all the country is like that but there is one thing you need not expect to come across water anywhere as at home. There's no springs or small drains all the water to be got is in the rivers only. I think the best way to tell you of the kind of country is to give you a description of this place I am in myself & then you can form a better idea of New Zealand. Well this place called Awhea but the proper name of it is Stoney Creek it extends to about twenty thousand acres. Remember this

[Page 3]

is only one of the runs there are none of them leased all bought freehold. Well the run is cut up into parks or paddocks as they are called here & the size of them is from seven hundred to sixteen hundred acres each (good sized parks them). Now the run carry about 20,000 sheep & fifteen hundred head of cattle not including calves. Man I often told you of Buffalo Bill's Wild West & the cow boys but here is a Buffalo Bill's show every day between horses & cattle running about they are quite as smart as the Yankees at horses & cattle here. You would think they would break their necks sometimes here to see the rate they go up & down these hills. I almost forgot to say this place is nearly as hilly as Deanich but no rocks only land slips which is very dangerous. Now the soil here is rich & heavy dark clay something of the same sort as between Ardgay & Bonar. You may be surprised at the small stock which is on this place but there are some of it to be cleared of bush yet. This bush is like what our own country was like when covered by woods. The trees of course are growing in this natural state some of them very large from 3 to 10 feet diameter & as thick as they can grow & between them other short scrub & ferns to the height of 18 feet

[Page 4]

& last but not least is a kind of wood called Supple Jack. It is as like a rope as could be some of it as small as a thread & others 3 ins in diameter. Nothing will break either the small or thick one. Now thousands of these go winding round & round every tree & branch attaching everything together for miles & miles. Now that is the curse of the forest here. Now that was the natural state of New Zealand & thousands of acres of it yet is covered by bush in the hands of the Government. This is the first class land

offered to intending emigrants & settlers. The clearing of bush is done in this way, it is let to contractors at so much per acre generally about two pound, he cuts everything about 3 foot high from the ground, now when it is some time down & dry sets it on fire & man what a fire it will be. Now of course it's only the small stuff that burns. Clean(?) after being burnt it will almost break your neck to go through it with stumps however now there's so much English grass sown but very often the bushy scrub gets up before the grass but consider yourself the expense it will cost to improve after buying it takes a long time to pay itself. Man I spent too much time over that land subject & so many other things I must touch on.

[Page 5]

I may say that in New Zealand they sow turnips broad cast they are very good for sheep. The shed they shear the sheep in here hold one thousand full grown sheep or 12 hundred hogs. It's all up off the ground a few feet & the sheep is on a place like a Brander(?) so it is always clean & plenty of fresh air. Now my opinion of New Zealand all through is very good. Any steady man will get plenty of work at a shilling an hour & his food. This is a good country for a very rich or a very poor man. If he is poor he can make money & if he is rich he can buy land and improve it thus doing good to himself & others but a man with a hundred or two is no use. I will now give you an idea how some of our north country men become farmers on their own land here. Well for instance they have say £300. Now they buy land with all that money. Now they get the land on conditions of doing improvements amounting to so much money per year. Now they invested all their money in buying the land but to stock it & improve of course they must borrow money on the security of the land. Now bad seasons or bad management they cannot pay their instalments or interest on this borrowed money so now they lose the land. Plenty people here is only too glad to lend money on the security of the land.

[Page 6]

that is the way you hear of so many fellows having land here & oh they sold their land for an awful lot of money – no but they are sold out as it were by these robbers called money lenders but as I said before either very poor or very rich is the men to get on in New Zealand. For every hundred pound a man puts in land he must have one thousand to improve & stock it – you would never take New Zealand to be so old, it looks to me like a place that was only opened a year ago instead of fifty years. There's not half enough of people in it yet especially men of money but it's very rough the life here besides home. A fellow must have his wits about him always. Of course all classes under the sun crowds to any opened up colony. Now I must tell you the life some of them lead here. There are plenty men here living in tents all the year round. Tents are much more common than houses. Plenty of men live alone for years & years in tents in the bush. Well this is how they do it they are working when they think they will & of course only get paid for what they do. All payments are by cheque in New Zealand & wages so high they soon make a good cheque so they go into town with say 15 or 20 pound & call at their favourite hotel. They give the cheque to the landlord to keep & they

[Page 7]

board in the hotel living like a Duke & have all the drink they want whether it's for them selves or anyone else. The landlord marks it down until the cheque is spent. He now tells the man his cheque is done so of course the man must go. Perhaps he's not a week when the landlord tells him his cheque is done. Of course landlords are always strictly honest catch me doing things like that. Well I must now say something of myself & how I am getting on. Well I may say that I am getting on first rate & I like the country exceedingly well although it's very rough compared with the home life. I am now living out about 6 miles from the home station as this is the burning season between one thing & another I am kept quite busy. I am living all alone in a nice hut but I might call it a cottage. You may imagine how a fellow feels to be alone here in the bush where all sorts of beasts & birds are squeaking & howling day & night enough to drive anyone off his head but I have plenty of dogs & shooting irons were it not for that I would not stop one night here alone. There are any amount of sport here, plenty of hunting. Man if you saw some of the deer here.

[Page 8]

It is quite common to kill a stag of 16 & 18 points there are any amount of them. I had a shot at one or two yesterday but did not kill any. I killed two boars in the Government bush which adjoins our boundary. I have killed a great many pigs. Now "och" man if you only saw them when they are engaged or wounded they would almost frighten anyone. They are sometimes dangerous if they get hold of anyone. I have some very beautiful tusks of them I killed. I got a fine collie dog torn to pieces with a boar & another dog torn not so bad he will get over it soon. I often laugh to myself when I think of what you said once in the Fold(?) about encountering a wild pig in the bush but little did I think then that I would be encountering them in the bush of New Zealand. I did get some frights with them but not a scratch yet. There are thousands of them here in the bush & out of it. They are much bigger & more fierce than they are at home. There are any amount of birds here to shoot plenty parrots & paraquets wild in the woods.

[Page 9]

There are also wild cattle sheep & goats in the Government bush but I hadn't a shot at any cattle yet. Well I must say the colonials are much smarter at pig hunting. Although I can handle the gun or rifle to any of them I am rather too frightened yet when after anything in the bush. Now I may say as far as I think I am getting on fine. Before I was a month here the Boss said I was the same as I had been 12 years in the colonies. The manager's brother who is managing another place gave me the present of a saddle & bridle which was very good of him. I had stayed with him for some time when I arrived here. The head Boss of all sent up the manager to me here to get the address of a pipe maker so he sent for a set of bagpipes. There's a piper about 12 miles from here he's from Inverness. He came for a night & of course myself had a blow as usual. I don't think the fellow better than myself at the pipes however when the Boss came over from England there were a piper on board so he's very fond of the pipes. I am sure they will be good pipes I mean real grand ones but we will see.

[Page 10]

He was first going to send for the best set of pipes they had but I told him that would be too expensive. Well I think that was proof enough that I am getting on well but for the other young fellows that came out they are almost useless. If they knew about sheep half as much as I do myself that would be sufficient. Anyone will do a shepherd here almost if he never saw a sheep before if themselves are smart at picking up what they see. Sheep are not nursed here as they are at home. During shearing time at the station they were using two sheep a day for mutton. There are sometimes upwards of eighty men working on the place and although I say it myself I may say I am what is called the Boss's right hand man. We always on Sunday have a sit in the verandah smoking, talking over old times & new & sometimes we ride round the run to see what has to be done during the coming week. It's here you see the rogues & rascals & know them sometimes to your cost. This is a very rough but happy free life. It's free almost in every respect. No Game Laws.

[Page 11]

As for education there are none. Almost all my old statistics are of no use here except the angles & squares because when men are bush or scrub cutting they are paid by the acre so that comes exceedingly handy. "Oh" man if you would only come here yourself we would put them through their facings(?). They know or care for nothing here except riding on horses as long as it's day light. They must have a horse & silver spurs if they haven't a shirt on their backs. Now I must tell you what I wear myself. Sometimes in cold weather knicker suits but for most white American duck trousers blue jumper or something like a very tight fitting slope(?) – a broad slouch hat belt with Bowie knife very much like the dress by Deadwood Dick's Crew if you remember but och man the tobacco is 6/6 the pound but like a fine fellow send me a newspaper. Tell Mary to send me one. I know she will if she would once think of it. I must write here and tell her about society here their habits dress etc

[Page 12]

Be sure & write me soon & give me all the news of the place. How is Rob getting on in Dunie & how is John McLeod. You may read this to him it will amuse him. Tell me if he got the letter I sent him also if yourself got the letter I sent you. It was posted here on the 14 Nov 1894. I suppose I will have the pipes by the time you get this & won't I blow them up I will frighten the Maories. Man I almost forgot to say

anything about them but I will leave it till next time. I could write for six months & then would not finish. Give my compliments to Mrs Anderson Miss Anderson Mr John & all other enquiring friends including the worthy John McLeod Fiddler. Now a letter as big as a church door you must send. Oh man the church is 30 miles from here, railway 40 miles. Well I conclude old mate with kind regards to all  
I am yours faithfully  
Donald Ross

Tell me how Eliza is getting on.