

# Molesworth Station

## Clarence Rafting Shelter

### Interpretation Panel 1

*"It was great seeing three young men work so well together with rarely a word being spoken. They had spent most of a year together in remote locations where equipment, huts, dogs and horses must be well looked after, not only because their job relies on them, but also their lives"*. Rob Suisted, reflecting upon a Molesworth Station muster.

2012



## BARREN COUNTRY

The isolated and mountainous Dillon Run country is amongst the least visited areas of Molesworth Station. Rarely do members of the public venture into these parts, with the exception of the occasional hunting party on foot or rafters who accept the challenge of a Clarence River journey. Trampers undertaking the East West Route cross well north of the historic Dillon Run but the land there is similar – a dun-coloured, barren, steep country where the Inland Kaikoura Range descends and divides to meet the Amuri and Hanmer Ranges to the south.

## AUTUMN MUSTER

Today's stockmen work the steep Dillon country, and land to the north, as part of their annual programme. One job is to push 400 head of cattle from summer pastures near the Molesworth homestead to traditional 'good feed' winter pastures in the enclosed Elliott and Tweed valleys. The muster includes driving cattle over the 1400 metre Robinson Saddle, believed to be one of the highest cattle-mustered passes in the world.

## 'BOY'S OWN' ADVENTURE

Photographer Rob Suisted accompanied the annual cattle muster to the Elliott and the Tweed in 2012. The experience included horses rolling in soft ground and throwing their riders into alpine bog, a search for a lost pig-hunting dog, a polar swim in Lake McRae, re-shoeing several horses and raiding a wild beehive for a blue borage flavoured honeycomb treat – all valuable research for a book on Molesworth that was being prepared with writer Harry Broad.



*"I learnt that managing the cattle and their behaviour was vital; the cattle needed to be pushed really hard to get them to climb high, but if you pushed them too hard they could just give up and sit down and then you're in trouble – a fine balance. The pass was reached in thick mist and fog at midday. As the mist lifted slightly with the descent it became apparent that we were creating our own mist; 400 puffing cattle beasts".*

Rob Suisted, reflecting upon a Molesworth Station muster, 2012 blog.



Elliott Bivvy.



Ascending Robinson Saddle.



Descending Robinson Saddle.

Photographs – Rob Suisted  
www.naturespic.com

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## Clarence Rafting Shelter

### Interpretation Panel 2

The land that once comprised the Dillon Run is now part of Molesworth Station. It is drier and more barren than station land to the west but contains some suitable cattle grazing land on valley floors where meandering streams provide essential moisture. Many adventurers who explore this convoluted mountain corner of Molesworth leave with a swag full of anecdotes to share with their friends.

### HIGH COUNTRY HUNTING

Hunting game on Molesworth over the decades provided a variation in diet to relieve the monotony of mutton in the early years and beef since the 1940s. A monotonous diet was part of being a rabbiter or musterer in the days when most meals were "mutton from merino or merino mutton", especially when the men "disdained to eat rabbit". In addition to venison there was wild pork, rainbow trout and duck eggs which were said to be a delicious addition to a chocolate brownie.

### CLARENCE WHO?

It appears the name Clarence was around prior to 1849 but whether it was named after the Duke of Clarence, the Clarence River in New South Wales, Australia or another source, no one seems to know. In his report on the trip along the coast from Lyttleton to Flaxbourne, as reported in the *Lyttleton Times* March 1851, Frederick Weld commented on being taken up the coast by whaleboat from the whaling station at Waipapa to be landed on the northern side of ... "a rapid and dangerous river, which flows between the 'Lookers-on' and the inland Kaikouras, and here falls into the sea; it has been variously named, as the Waipapa, the Big River, and the Clarence, which name appears the most euphonious and easily remembered". Weld was right in that it was the name that stuck. The Māori name for the river is Waiau-toa.



Proud group of musterers with 'nibbies' (walking poles) and catch of the day on Molesworth.



New Zealand falcon.



Musterers' camp in the Clarence Reserve.



Pack horses amongst the limestone bluffs of the Clarence Reserve.



Back country trampers outside Yarra Hut, St Helens, left to right Bob Pilgrim, David Dalzell and A.D.R. Russell.



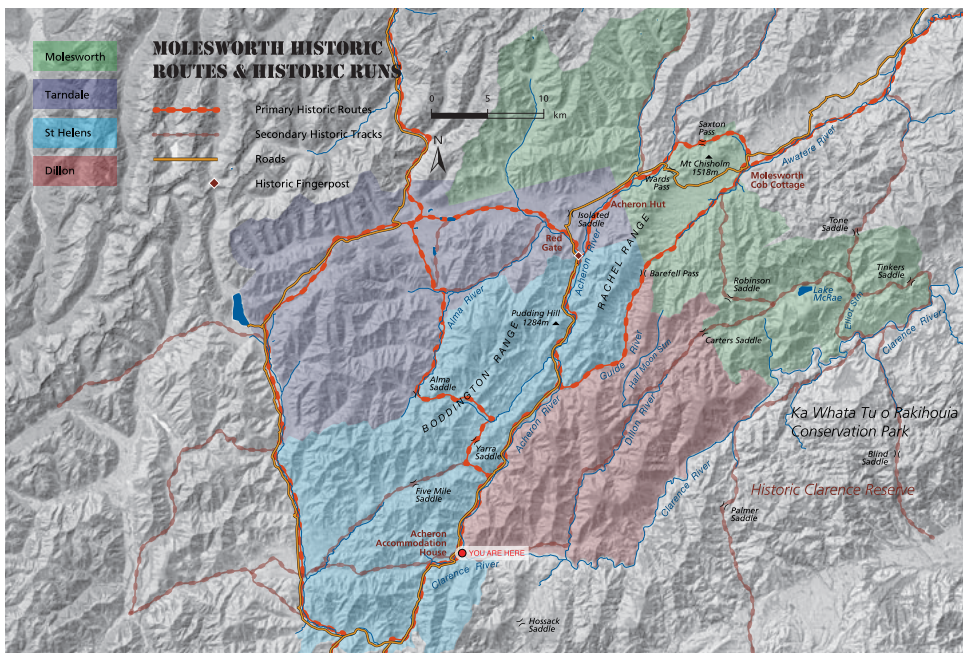
## THE DILLON RUN

The Dillon Run covered approximately 31,000 hectares and was named after the Dillon River and its watershed.

It was earlier known as the North Clarence Run and at least from Thomas Carter's period of ownership it appears to always have been farmed in conjunction with the Clarence Run. The Carter Brothers had a house on the terrace at the junction of the Acheron and Clarence rivers opposite the Acheron Accommodation House.

When W. A. Low amalgamated the St Helens and Clarence runs in 1877 the Dillon, although a separate lease, was also included. The Dillon Run was incorporated into Molesworth with St Helens in 1949.

The Dillon Run was bounded by the Clarence River on its southern and eastern sides, the Acheron and Guide Rivers to the west and the head of the Half Moon Stream and Carters Saddle in the north. Much of the run was south-facing and had a reputation for being cold and suffered large stock losses in big snow years. The land was isolated, steep and contained many bare rocky tops and large shingle slides. Although a report to the Commissioner of Lands from the Blenheim Survey Office suggested that a suitable homestead could be established at the junction of the Dillon and Clarence rivers and that some good feed was available in the lower valleys of the Dillon watershed, it is not surprising that the run was never taken on as a separate farming enterprise and was always part of a larger operation.



## RIVER & GORGE

The Clarence River is one of the largest rivers on the eastern South Island to remain unmodified by dams or water abstraction. As it makes its way to the ocean it passes through open areas where it can spread out into several braids. Elsewhere it is confined to a single channel and in places it flows between rocky bluffs in dramatic gorges. Birds such as the black-fronted tern *Chlidonias albostratus* (1) rely on braided sections to breed over summer. The cliffs in the gorges are home to plants such as New Zealand lilac *Heliohebe hulkeana* (2) and Marlborough rock daisy *Pachystegia "B"* (3). The river itself is an arterial route for many of our migratory native fish including long-fin eel *Anguilla dieffenbachii* (4).



Photographs – DOC; Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ; A. D. R. Russell Collection; Colin Wynn; Marlborough Museum and Historical Society; Peter Langlands; Jan Clayton-Greene; Shannel Courtney; Rob Suisted [www.naturespic.com](http://www.naturespic.com)