

NATIVE BOYS WILL FARM WHERE THE GRASS IS GROWING WILD

NATIVE boys whose ancestors trod the heartless wastes of the inland with a hunting spear will learn to win food a new way. With their new skills will come a security that they have never known before, thanks to the Schenks.

Eighteen miles inland from Esperance, two and a half miles from Gibson's Soak railway siding, and within neighbourly distance of the local agricultural research station, two young farmers with diplomas day dream as they rip up the virgin soil with second-hand gift ploughs.

This wouldn't be of interest to Sandgroppers at large if at the end of their dreamland furrows were wealth and wives and the rest of the familiar pattern of prosperity, but these—if they come into the picture at all—are quite incidental.



The immediate object of their scheming is a flourishing training farm where young native boys, during the critical years between school leaving age and 16, can be

trained to lead useful lives on the land.

For these boys "go on the land" in this case means leaving the thirsty, dusty soil of the Goldfields, where their parents or grandparents hunted goannas, to till the well-watered coastal plains where, to their delight, "the grass grows wild".

The dreamers' long-range plan, which anticipates eventual government co-operation, is the ultimate establishment of the Wongutha Agricultural College. Wongutha is the name given by the aborigines to their own race.

The story goes that 22-year old Roderick Schenk, only son of the co-founders of Mt. Margaret Mission and an early playmate of many of its dusky inhabitants, became aware one day that he, too, had been born with a mission.

A graduate of Longernerong Agricultural College, Victoria, he took a temporary job as farmhand to gain local experience of the Esperance Downs, and snapped up two 1,000-acre lots that were advertised in the Western Mail.

Then, finding a twin soul in a fellow collegian—21-year old John May—the two began their back-breaking pioneering work in August last year.

The two-man team has begged, borrowed or been handsomely endowed with two second-hand ploughs a new ten-disc seeder, a 1929 utility truck, a second-hand trailer, a new post-boring machine, two tons of wire, one 2,000-gallon tank and temporary quarters in the shape of a 10 by 12 hut complete with stove and small tank.

Lords of all they survey, they are pressing on with clearing, fencing and ploughing preparatory to sowing a seedbed of clover next month.

Although the land is typical Esperance Downs country, light, sandy and hungry, the pals are confident that trace elements and clovers will build up the farm to productive capacity within five years, especially when they remember that the research station nearby has been carrying four sheep to the acre in the driest season for years.

Dipping into a prospectus which is just off the Schenk family typewriter—details have been sanctioned by the Commissioner of Native Affairs—the farm will be a place where native boys from six mission schools can train to become efficient farm workers, managers and even owners, as well as being watched for any trend towards specialisation in carpentry, plumbing, saddlery and similar occupations.

In accordance with the leader's ideals, the spiritual welfare of the little community will be of major consideration, and as both are good sportsmen, there will be plenty of guided reaction.

As the plan stands now, the biggest problems to be overcome are the building of dormitories and classrooms, refectory and kitchen, demonstration block and staff quarters; the recruiting of trained staff, and the drawing up of a suitable curriculum.



Further down on the agenda are workshop and machinery shed; piggery, fowl houses and dairy; shearing shed and hatchery; tennis courts, swimming pool, orchard, native homes and a community store.

Some of the pioneering difficulties over, the students will embark on a two-year course that will include the three R's, English, farm practices, social studies, physics and chemistry.

Later, confident in their new status, the boys should have ample opportunity for putting their knowledge into practical use, particularly in this newly opened-up district, which has been surveyed and sold to 200 farmers.

An ambitious project? Yes, but not so formidable by Schenk standards.