



Ben Rudd, a gardener of repute in Dunedin at the turn of the century, owned and farmed land at the top of Rudds Road, from 1890 to 1919. In 1919 he sold his farm and retired for a short period to Dunedin city. Finding urban life unbearable, in 1921 he purchased a 45 ha block of land on the northern flank of Flagstaff and lived on this property until he died in 1930 at the age of 76. Ben was intolerant of trespassers, claiming at onetime that up to 100 trespassers a week were causing him considerable annoyance and damaging the property.

In 1923 a party from the newly formed Otago Tramping Club was “warned off” by Ben Rudd. One of those in the party descried “the feelings of alarm as they encountered the stocky bearded little man with the shot-gun.” Despite the initial antipathy, Ben Rudd eventually established very good relations with the club. To help prevent further trespassing the Club paid him £5.00 to cut a track round his property.

Ben Rudd died in 1930 and his property was bought by the club in 1946. The club’s committee learned only by chance that the Rudd property was available, significantly, as it was probably the only property in the area not already owned or spoken for by the Dunedin City Corporation.

The transaction, although undertaken by the committee without reference to the general membership was enthusiastically endorsed at the next AGM. The money for the purchase was

loaned by Mr W Stevenson, who later refused to accept repayment; a generous gesture that has long been appreciated.

- From the clubs Friend of Ben Rudd's Certificate.

Where tussock begins ...

Mt Flagstaff keeps vigil on our city. In time of rain it hides away. Settlers knew the area, one more so than most: Rudd by surname and solitude an aim.

Before exile, the English-born migrant learned his craft well – from all accounts. Dunedin Town had no better gardener.

After first urban years Ben Rudd settled 40 acres at Flagstaff where a byway signifies his title. Any dwelling has gone, though relics are visible. Picture a wee man living rough up yonder, wild pig as meat for the pot, with a rabbit or two when empty; like hermits of old, contented alone.

Farm development kept Mr Rudd busy in mid-life. Stock were grazed instead of tillage, for nature could zap the best of crops. Snow lay early on Flagstaff and often stayed late. While horse and foot were modus operandi people riled him less, but as Dunedin grew and travel improved bother came along.

Legends tell of youth driven off by an ancient scattergun fired at random; also of a rare journey from Kaikorai Valley to the “smoke” by cable car. Pint-sized Ben fell out with a mammoth Edwardian dandy; temper ablaze he swung on the man's watch chain, kicking shins like a demented elf!

Photographs reveal Ben's Place lay near the summit route, which could often bring intruders. An assault and trespassing lawsuit of 1907 confirms the trend. On finding a picnic circle with billy aglow Ben took offence – combat with a younger bloke left him second best. Later court action yielded a shilling and costs were allowed.

This highlighted years of hostility on access matters.

Much dirty linen was aired in court of prior violence. While oft provoked Ben had an obsession about his rights worthy of King Canute.

Increasingly unwell he battled on for another 12 years, selling in 1919. Life in Dunedin had less appeal, however, and 18 months saw him back at Flagstaff camped near his late abode.

Illness finally overtook him at the public hospital. He died in February 1930, aged 76 years.

Tramping Club members are said to have tended his old patch for some time after.

Footnote: Eighty-odd years ago much of Flagstaff and Whare Flat comprised small farms. These have since been purchased by the city. You can wander safely now, apart from trail bikes! – Dunedin Star Midweek, 24/5/1995. Community News. Peter McLauchlan's Sketchbook. With Bill Brosnan.

Installation and Dedication of the Linda Mercier Memorial Seat.

The crowd met on Saturday 20 April 2002 at the Bullring and made light work of carrying the materials pre-built by Peter Mason to Ben Rudd's hut site. A contingent from the Merciers arrived at lunch time to catch the last of the installation process for the large durable seat. Everyone, including the children, helped, and a track was put in to the site, which will command a splendid view from the beech trees.

1930s

Old Ben eased back to rest on the slope beside his home and wipes away the sweat from his face. Funny how snowgrass seedheads are always tickling your face no matter where you sit, he thinks, as he watches the sunset glow extending right over Silver Peak. Crunching the last of this year's gooseberries from his garden, he thinks of the stupid boys from school a few decades ago who taunted him about his size, who made him just want to spend his life alone. No pests up here in his little piece of heaven. Time to turn in. More track cutting tomorrow for those trampers, he thinks, then I'll put on my best jacket and go into that blasted Dunedin for supplies. He hangs his rough old coat on the three-prong coat hook screwed into the rafter by the door, gets his fire going from the lunch-time embers and begins to cook up his tea. This is life, he thinks. Day to day peace.

Early 1950s

Old Ben has gone, but his home remains, lovingly maintained by his old friends in the OTC. They never ever got to really know the old chap, but they all admired him. There's a bit of broom climbing the hill into the tussock. Something Ben would have seen off. "All in a day's work" as he would have muttered to himself. It's a pleasant day and the place is peaceful as usual until two stupid boys from school show up among the tussock from the Flagstaff summit. "Hey, nobody around. Let's have a look inside to see if there's any gold. The old hermit was probably a miner." "Don't be stupid. No gold here." "Hey, look at the old coat hook up on the rafter. Bet I can swing on it." There's a groan of timber, and the old rafter begins to shift. The old man's home can't stand too much of this treatment. Luckily for the rafter, the screws in the three-prong coat hook let go and the kid falls, laughing, on the floor, although he's hurt himself. The other one, having finished carving his name, is really amused. Great to see someone else hurt, eh? The boy gets to his feet and yells at the coat hook in his hand as if his fall was all its fault. He steps outside. Flings the offending article up the hill into the flax.

2000s

Just another work day by those trampers and mountaineers from the OTMC. It's still a peaceful spot, although the stupid boys from school still cannot leave Ben alone. They have tried to burn down the shelter that replaces his home, and continue to leave their names and obscenities as only stupid boys can. It's a working party today, though, in a group that bears his name with pride: "The Friends of Ben Rudds", installing a seat at the point where you can still see that treasured view of Ben's. It's misty, but the folk catch a glimpse of Silver Peak every so often. One of the workers, digging out a hole for one of the four seat legs, uncovers a three-prong coat hook from among the broom roots ... and, wiping away the sweat from his face, wonders about its history.

- From Ben Rudd's Management Trust Friends of Ben Rudd's Newsletter, No. 9

The shelter site with Linda's seat, Ben Rudd's house site, the Bruce Campbell beech trees and the remains of Ben's garden is of interest The majority of the beech trees were planted and more pig damage to former plantings was undone. The ground in front of the Linda Mercier seat was raised and secured and the Shelter's fireplace with its concrete slab was demolished and/or buried under soil and turf. The shelter was cleaned out. Some of the worst snow damage on the track was tidied up. A permit is required for every fire on the property, including any billy-boiling at the shelter.

- From Ben Rudd's Management Trust Friends of Ben Rudd's Newsletter, No.11

Ben Rudd died on 2 march 1930 at age 76 and is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) from an article published by [Ian](#) under [Tramping Areas General Information](#) for the Otago Tramping Club Inc.