

A changing landscape

BY LLOYD ESLER

ORETI Beach has been a playground for Invercargillites since the Dunns Road Bridge was opened on 13 November 1929.

The new bridge meant there was easy access to Sandy Point and Invercargill people poured out in their droves to picnic, swim, fish, fly kites, make sandcastles, dig toheroa and play games.

Before rabbits were liberated on Sandy Point in 1863 the sand dunes in the area were lower and more mobile, held in place by the beautiful golden sedge Pingao.

The burrowing of rabbits and the damage to the fragile vegetation by the hooves of sheep and cattle allowed the surface to break up.

Massive drifts of sand moved over the Sandy Point Peninsula, swamping lagoons, farms and forests and spilling into the estuary, threatening the channels and anchorages.

What to do?

The answer was to import marram seed and presently the sand stopped moving. Brushwood fences near the main entrance helped establish the new line of dunes.

Although the native dune plants have largely disappeared, marram supports an important ecosystem, providing a home for insects and ground-nesting birds.

Sand dunes are threatened by natural events such as storms and invading plants but humans can be a problem as well.

Vehicles – four-wheel drives, quad bikes and motorbikes – tear the growing shoots and prevent the marram from doing its job, which is to stop the sand moving.

We don't want to go back to the bad old days of the late 1800s so keep your wheels off the dunes!

