



**TOP:** McCallum Brothers supplies Auckland's iconic red rock from its family-owned Karamuramu Island.

**INSETS:** From top: Moehau Quarry; Cement for Motetapu; Metal heading to Gisborne.

## Seeing red

McCallum Brothers has a history beginning at the start of the 20th Century, when it began supplying red jasper to Auckland's construction market. As demand for the now iconic product grew, so did the company. BY HUGH DE LACY

**U**ntil the big grey-stone quarries started opening up on the Auckland isthmus after World War One, a company barging red metal from a couple of tiny islands in the eastern Hauraki Gulf was the main supplier of aggregate to the city that soon became New Zealand's largest.

The company was McCallum Brothers, and more than a century on from its founding by four brothers in 1904, it remains an icon of the Auckland building supplies industry, with the red shingle it quarries on the family-owned Karamuramu Island, 3km offshore from Kawakawa Bay, now a premium aggregate available throughout the country.

Founded by William Fraser McCallum and his brothers Archie, Dan and Alec, the company is today in the hands of fourth generation brothers John and Callum McCallum, who in the last couple of years have set about revitalising the old family concern around the dredging of sand off Pakiri Beach, Northland, under newly-won resource consents.

The company has been extracting the high-quality manne sands



of the Pakiri-Te Arai embayment since World War Two, and it now comprises the larger part of the business. But it was the jasper red rock of Pakihi Island that got the business off the ground, with the founding brothers initially loading it by shovel and wheelbarrow onto a 40-tonne wooden scow, named Pakihi, for shipping to the young metropolises.

Red chert, or jasper, looks like volcanic rock but is actually formed as sedimentary deposits deep in the earth, where they were exposed to high temperatures and pressures which fused the particles into a highly resilient and relatively lightweight red rock.

Rather than its colour, it was the suitability of the jasper as a building material that made its distinctive mark on Auckland. In the year the company was founded it was used in the fabrication of the first pre-cast concrete piles in Australasia, commissioned for its wharves by the Auckland Harbour Board.

It was also the aggregate used in Auckland's spectacular Grafton Bridge which, at the time it was completed in 1910, included the world's largest reinforced concrete arch span - 98 metres out of a total length of 290 metres, with a width of 11.25 metres soaring up to 45 metres above the floor of Grafton Gully.

The shovels and wheelbarrows quickly gave way to bucket and drag dredges, and a fleet of scows was built up that distributed aggregate from both islands, though in 1911 the Pakihi quarry was closed and the only surviving relic of it is a single wharf pile on the south-western side.

Thanks to the scows' capacity and the limitations of early road transport, McCallum Brothers' aggregate dominated the Auckland market until World War Two, being used in many central city buildings, including the War Memorial Museum, the Central Railway Station and the Newmarket Viaduct.

McCallums also supplied the metal for the Whenuapai, Hobsonville and Ardmore aerodromes, and the Huia dam.

As early as World War One, the company had been taking sand, comprising pumice from the Taupo area and mine tailings from the Karangahake goldfields near Waihi, from the Waikou River

**ABOVE: Sand mining forms a core part of the McCallum Brothers business and it recently won a legal battle to continue sand mining operations at Pakiri.**



**THIS PAGE: Supplying sand for beach repair work on Auckland's waterfront.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCCALLUM BROTHERS

on the Hauraki Plains. This trade ended in the early 1970s as the construction industry began to demand sands of higher quality.

By then McCallum Brothers had been taking increasing amounts of marine sands from the Mangawhai/Pakiri area for nearly 30 years. These sands are notable for their consistent grain size and freedom from silt and other contaminants, characteristics that made them especially sought-after with the emergence of ready-mix concreting.

McCallum Brothers, Sea-Tow and other companies had no problems getting successive permits for marine sand-extraction until 2003, by which time the Mangawhai/Pakiri area had become a minor Mecca for beach-owners from Auckland, and an increasing number of permanent residents. The Auckland Regional Council (ARC) had by then also paid \$20 million for land at Pakiri to create a regional park.

Accordingly when McCallums and Sea-Tow applied that year for a 20-year renewal of their licences and an increase in quantities to 76,000 cubic metres a year, they ran into a wall of opposition. What stood the applicants in good stead was the fact that they had been monitoring the effects of sand-extraction for years and all indications were that natural cycles, both accretionary and erosional, were the most likely causes of any shoreline changes to the beach.

It was also evident that the sands were being replenished constantly by storms shifting new sand across the closure depths from off-shore deposits, shell break-down and the influence of river flows.

The ARC turned down the application but, emboldened by the knowledge that the total take amounted to only 1.8mm a year across the whole of the embayment, the two companies appealed to the Environment Court.

And they won.

In June of this year Judge David Sheppard ruled that the ARC and the other objectors had offered no credible proof that sand-mining was having any effect on the beaches, so he issued permits for the increased amount, albeit for only a 14-year term.

The court also approved the companies' proposed monitoring conditions and declined the input the objectors wanted to make.

"That was marvellous, because Auckland relied on this sand to carry out the infrastructural construction the government has implemented," Callum McCallum told *NZ Quarrying and Mining*.

The McCallum brothers are presently in the process of revitalising the old family company.

"What we're looking at is a whole new re-branding of McCallums. We have now refocused our business on its core operations: sand extraction, quarrying, and barging and trucking," McCallum says.

The company used to have a concrete plant on Rosebank Road, Avondale, and, though it was close to the motorway, traffic changes over the years had made vital areas like South Auckland increasingly difficult to access. So the brothers recently sold the plant to Allied Concrete, another family-owned business, with whom they entered into a marketing deal to make the famous red rock concrete available nationwide.

Atlas, Counties, Wilson's and Waibek Ready-Mix also supply the red stuff throughout the Auckland area while McCallums continues to supply an ever-increasing proportion of the sand for the Auckland construction industry.

McCallum Brothers has come a long way from the days of shovels, wheelbarrows and scows. It now has a fleet of motorised dredges and barges, and employs about 60 staff. And between the new sand-mining permits and the marketing deals with the likes of Allied, the original four McCallum Brothers' legacy looks set to live on well into the future. ■