

SLY GROG!

NAME INC ALIASES:

Murdoch McLeod

NATIVE PLACE:

Scotland

RELIGION:

Presbyterian

OFFENCE:

Illicit distillation

SENTENCE:

Fined £100,
or three months

In a 'sequestered spot' at Powder Creek, Silverstream, near Whare Flat one evening in April 1889, Murdoch McLeod and Alexander McGregor were quietly minding their own business when, acting on a tip-off, the police turned up unexpectedly and found their illicit whisky still hidden in the undergrowth.

The pair hadn't time to hide or destroy the evidence, and were caught with about 230 gallons of fermented wort (or 'wash') ready for its final distillation into 'mountain dew'. In court, McLeod pleaded guilty, but McGregor tried to claim that he knew nothing about the still and had simply gone along with McLeod to chop some wood to help him repair

his hut – this was at 11 p.m. and, as it turned out, without an axe.

The judge didn't fall for this story, and both of them got a £100 fine or three months inside. This was a huge fine for those days (equivalent in purchasing power to more than \$20,000 today), and about three times the estimated value of the alcohol they had been caught with.

McGregor's fine was paid, perhaps by his father, who was a well-to-do farmer, but McLeod served his sentence, although he remained liable for the fine.

Photo: New Zealand Police Museum

