

capital needed to forestall severe soil deterioration and plant diseases will soon be reached.

### 6. The Medium Farmstead: Squeezed in the Middle

Fernando Alvarez Flores (age: late 40s), his wife Luisa Vega Herrera (mid-30s), and their six children (aged 2.5 months to mid-teens) own a 40 ha farm near the small hamlet of Yheri about 9 km northeast of the Buenos Aires town center. Nestled in a bend of the upper Río Platanares, this is a region of low rolling foothills on the southern flank of the Cordillera de Talamanca. The immediate vicinity contains a mix of small and medium-sized farms creating a mosaic of cultivated fields, modest pastures, and patches of remnant forest and second-growth woodlands along stream valleys and on the crowns of some hills. The Bribri Indian community of Salitre is situated several kilometers to the west.

Fernando and Luisa's family originally derived from the community of Pejibaye in the neighboring canton of Perez Zeledon to the west. They were among the first non-Indian families to move into the upper Platanares area when an opportunity arose in 1985 to obtain 40 ha of land in the southern part of the indigenous reserve encompassing Salitre and Ujarrás. This parcel was purchased from another white farmer who had acquired the land directly from previous Bribri owners.

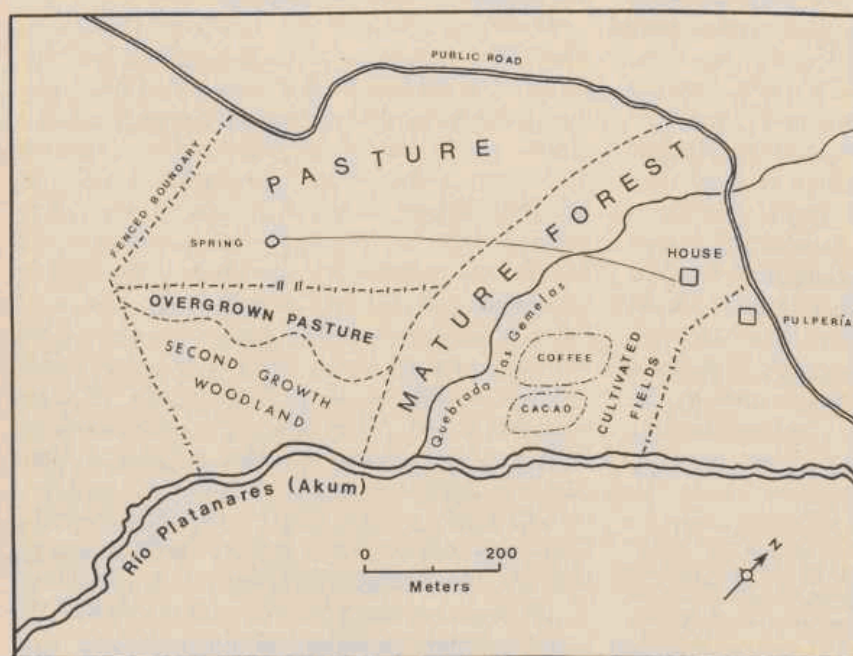
Other non-Indians quickly followed suit, so that, by 1986, the growing cluster of pioneering farm families became known as Yheri. Currently about 12 families or 100 people comprise this dispersed community. A pulpería, a primary school, and a small Catholic "templo" or shrine provide a settlement focus along the rough road that connects Yheri with Salitre and Buenos Aires to the southwest and the community of Puente to the southeast.

#### a) Patterns of Land Use

Fernando and Luisa's 40 ha comprise a rough oval shape bounded on the south by the Río Platanares and on the north by a public road (map 4). The land rises steeply from the river at about 400 m in altitude toward a crest of 500-meter hills to the northwest. Even at this modest scale, the family refers to the former zone as "bajura" or "tierra bajura" (lowlands) and the latter area as "altura" or "tierra altura" (highlands).

The property is bisected by a quebrada which supports a 10 ha corridor of mature forest or bosque grande, in local usage. Another 25 ha encompass the steep slopes to the west of the quebrada, an area devoted largely to pasto or cattle pasture in varying degrees of use and conditioning.

The largest section of pasture is in a form called potrero, or pasto limpio, meaning that the grasses are relatively "clean" or devoid of invading vegetation. A smaller section is in a stage referred



Map 4: Informant-generated map of Yheri farm (scale approximate).