

Parks of the People

New Zealand's Natural Heritage

by David Thom, Chairman, National Parks and Reserves Authority

The national park idea had its birth in the United States, with the declaration of the Yellowstone National Park in 1872. Just two years later the idea was imported into New Zealand, to become the basis of an historic action in 1887. Over the century which has followed, New Zealanders have created their own national park ethic, an approach to administration, and a national park system of international standing.

The journey of the national park idea in New Zealand is very much a journey of discovery about the real nature of New Zealand. For the major part of the one hundred years of the journey, the focus has been on scenery; areas where beauty and drama captured the imagination of European settlers, without any need to ponder the reasons for beauty and drama. Another very important factor has been land protection; initially an important influence in the formation of Egmont National Park, and the most important aspect in the formation of Urewera National Park.

Park origins

The origin of Tongariro National Park was a very special and unusual story from the mainstream of our history, and springing from the very different cultural values put on land by Maori and European: the one, protection of sacred heritage; the other, to safeguard the mountains against the sort of exploitation that impelled the Yellowstone decision. New Zealand's second National Park, Egmont, in 1900 followed a more

conventional pattern. The Provincial Government of Taranaki laid the foundations with the reservation of a radius around the mountain in 1875. Much of Taranaki was at that time covered with forest that was swept away in the 1880s and 90s by the rapid development of dairy farming which followed the successful application of refrigeration.

The great scientist Leonard Cockayne was a major influence in the formation of Arthur's Pass National Park. Cockayne understood and pointed to the significance of unique evolution in New Zealand, and regarded Arthur's Pass as an important example of trans-alpine floral transition. Cockayne's classical ecological survey of Tongariro National Park in 1908 with E. Phillips Turner eventually enlarged Tongariro National Park to something approaching the area it is today.

Initial reservations in Fiordland which followed soon after the early Arthur's Pass reservations were promoted by arguments for tourism values, largely by Thomas Mackenzie, later the foundation president of the Native Bird Protection Society. Science as a justification for national park formation submerged, after Cockayne, although the New Zealand Institute and the later Royal Society were strong advocates for scientific protection, and promoted, year after year, the special circumstances of natural history in New Zealand. It was branches of the New Zealand Institute that in the 1880s pressed successfully for the establishment of Resolution and Little Barrier Islands as



sanctuaries for native birds.

By the 1880s decline in native bird populations was very marked. From the 1840s on, acclimatisation, with very little consideration for consequences, had been pursued with astonishing zeal, with an even more astonishing number of importations of animals and plants. The first rabbit plagues led to the introduction of stoats, weasels, and ferrets, which increased the attack on native birdlife. While burning of forest increased steadily from the 1840s, forest destruction by fire reached a new and terrible level in the 1880s and 1890s, as by this time a railway and road system had greatly extended access inland.

Even at this time, however, a large area of the central North Island was relatively unaffected. Development, European-style, had

A tourist party on the Franz Josef Glacier, 1906. Photo: Canterbury Museum.



Above: The mineral rich waters of Emerald Lake on the slopes of Mt. Tongariro, Tongariro National Park. Photo: Eric Taylor

Right: Pioneer ecologist Leonard Cockayne was a strong advocate about the turn of the century for the establishment of Arthur's Pass National Park. Later he carried out a classical ecological survey of Tongariro National Park which was a very significant influence on its future shape and extent. Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library

been retarded by the policies of the Maori King movement which had prior to the land was refused to sell land, and resisted surveying and road construction. In effect the King Movement had applied a land protection policy through the period that the national park idea was generating in the United States, and long enough for some European New Zealanders to gain insights into the desperate need for conservation in New Zealand.



European influence in the Ureweras was retarded right into the 1890s. By this time a few influential New Zealanders, including no less a figure than Julius Vogel, had been pointing to connections between forest destruction, flooding and erosion, for 20 years. Their text had been often 'Man and Nature' by the American, George Perkins Marsh, himself an observer of events on the frontier.

Vast forest destruction

Through the 1880s and 1890s, forest destruction, driven by the expanding transport network on the one hand, and the expanding dairy industry on the other, was on a vast scale. Scenery preservation societies sprang up; the developing perceptions of the first generation of European New Zealanders, coupled with the advent of Harry Ell in Parliament combined to produce the

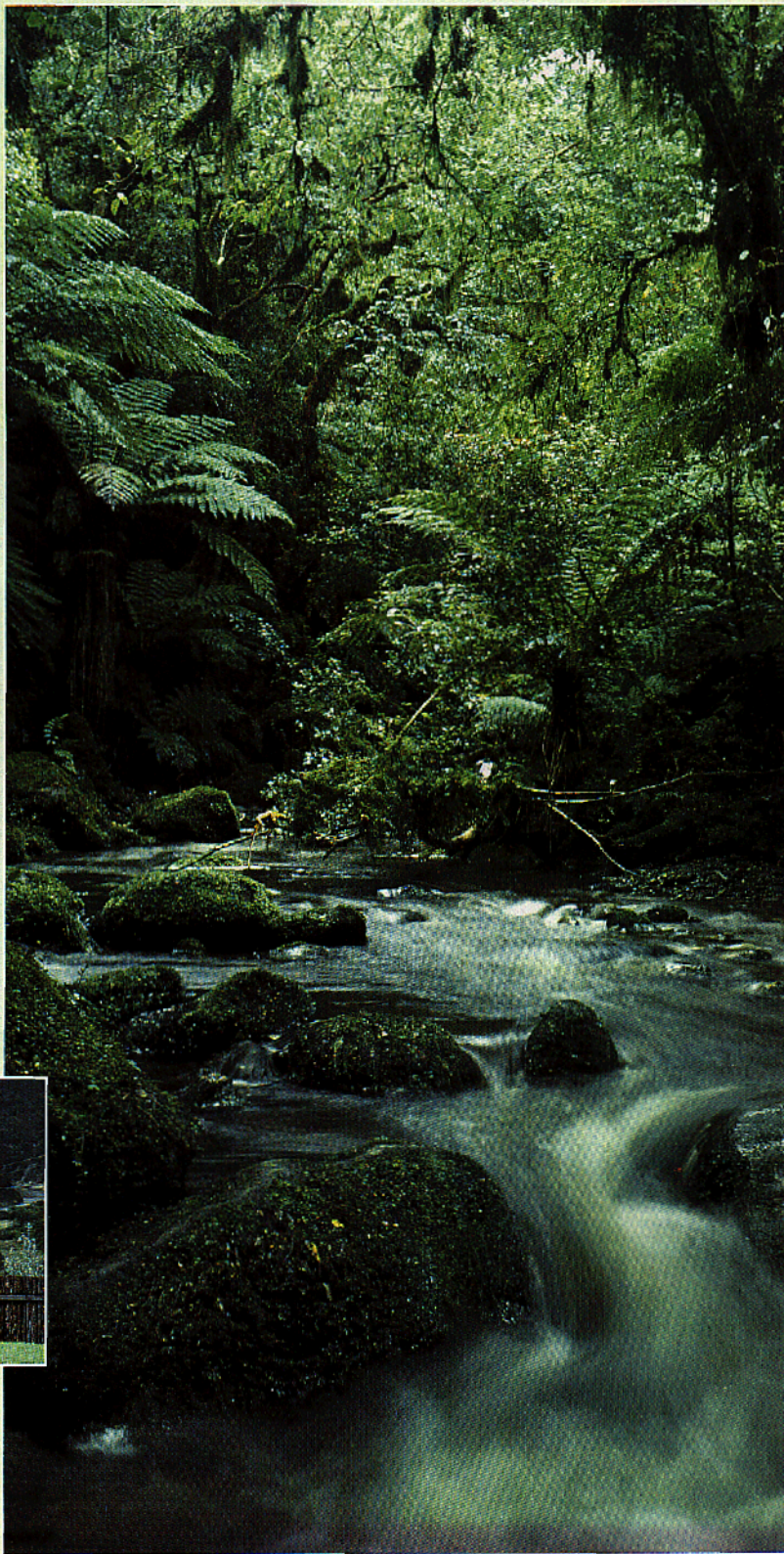
By the 1970s conservationists were demanding lowland forest areas with production potential to become part of the national park system. The best known case is the addition of Waikukupa-South Okarito forests to Westland National Park. At present conservationists are pressing for the lowland forests of Waitutu to be added to Fiordland National Park. Photo: Geoff Spearpoint



Paramount chief Te Heuheu Tukino IV. Horomuku's gift of 2600 ha of the central North Island created New Zealand's first and the world's fourth national park. Photo: Burton Bros. by courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library



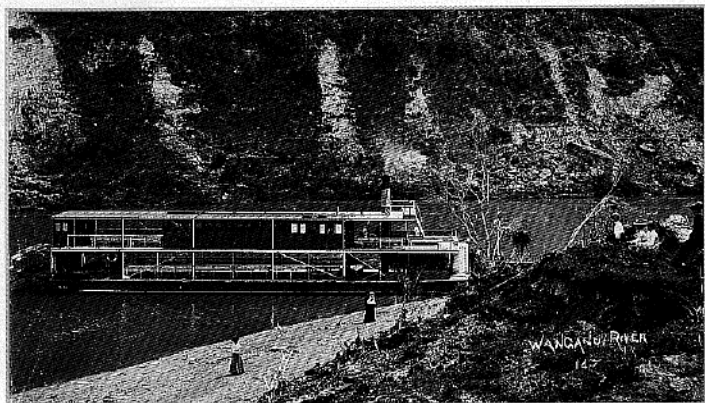
New Zealand's latest national park, the Whanganui, was officially declared open at a ceremony on the Pipiriki marae at the beginning of the year. Photo: Garry McSwiney.



Scenery Preservation Act. Over the next twenty years, the Scenery Preservation Commission and the Board which followed laid the foundations for the reservation we have today.

It was well into the 1920s before 'national park' began to collect some definition in terms of an ethic or a defined objective. The term has been always understood as a trusted (often the only trusted) level of protection. Many national park proposals have arisen from a general wish to protect land, using the only perceived and secure designation.

The ethic and objectives of the national park idea in New Zealand were shaped by events of the 1920-40 period. By 1920, the deer importations of the late 1800s, and early 1900s had resulted in populations which could be recognised as a threat and



Tourism has been a strong influence in the shaping of our national park system even before the 1890s when Thomas Mackenzie was pointing to the importance of the Fiordland area. The Wanganui River was in the early 1900s billed as the 'Rhine of New Zealand' with a fleet of steamers servicing tourist journeys on the river. Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library

fourth. Abel Tasman has quite a curious connection with the Second World War. Like many other campaigns, that by Perrine Moncrieff and Nelson people had land protection as its objective. They saw the significance of 1942 as the tercentenary of Abel Tasman's arrival in Golden Bay, and pointed to the appropriateness of joining with our allies in the War, the Dutch people, in the national park declaration. The Queen of the Netherlands became the Patron of the park.

Creative partnership

The Federated Mountain Clubs took a key role in the 30s and 40s in the shaping of our very fine national park legislation. Conservation works best in New Zealand when government and citizen join in a creative partnership. Such a partnership functioned through the 1940s, A.P. Harper, Lance McCaskill, F.M.C., Forest and Bird, and the Royal Society all being involved on the citizen side. The catalyst proved to be Ron Cooper in the Department of Lands and Survey, supported by his Director-General D.M. Greig, and two reservation conscious ministers, Messrs Skinner and Corbett. Cooper was actually responsible for the wording of some of the important philosophical statements which come down to us today in the 1980 Act.

American ideas influenced New Zealand National Park development from the 1930s onward, initially through McCaskill who visited the United States several times. When the philosophy, which was eventually incorporated into the National Parks Act of 1952, was being hammered out in the 1940s by reformers like McCaskill and A.P. Harper, the Federated Mountain Clubs, and government officials, McCaskill was testing New Zealand ideas against American practice.

The first National Parks Authority carried out an enormous task, bringing the system together, establishing boards, and defining policy; in short, bringing order out of the chaos of different administrations. Some parks had been administered under the Domain Act by the Department of Lands and Survey, and others had been set up at dif-

ferent times by specific legislation which resulted in different board structures.

While the ranger service can be said to have begun with Richard Henry on Resolution Island in the 1890s, it was in the 1950s that it began to develop strength and expertise. The service expanded, training programmes commenced, and *esprit de corps* evolved.

By 1964, there were ten national parks, and an established ranger service. The whole system, was, and remained until 1980, citizen-administered with the Authority responsible for policy and general oversight, and the boards in executive control of their parks. Rangers were employed directly by the boards, but this changed in the late 60s when the rangers became an employment group within the civil service in order to provide a career structure. The Depart-



ment by forest experts. By the 1930s high deer populations and forest destruction were reaping the grim harvests of soil erosion and flooding. Lance McCaskill, and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, took a leading role in the advocacy which resulted in the passage of our first soil conservation legislation. Growing awareness of the importance of land protection influenced the establishment of the reservation which later became Urewera National Park.

It was the deer and goat which shaped the 'extermination' provisions of the eventual national park legislation, just as heather in and near Tongariro National Park shaped the attitude to introduced plants. In the 1900-1920 period 'national park' was clearly public land, but some influential people saw it as 'park' in a European sense. John Cullen, the warden of Tongariro National Park, with the support of William Massey, the Prime Minister, set out to plant a huge grouse moor with Scottish Heather. The debates about this issue helped to clarify the objectives which were stated later.

It is in some respects surprising that Abel Tasman National Park should have been the



This 1930s Railways poster has an almost military aspect. Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library



The creation of most of New Zealand's national parks has demanded little economic sacrifice, since by far the majority have been mountainous areas. It has been estimated that only half of one percent of New Zealand's land area has been designated a national park or reserve where the land also had production potential. Mt Cook from the west. Photo: Gerard Hutching

ment of Lands and Survey, through a period of very rapid expansion, established a national parks directorate, and took various other steps to enhance departmental capability. Winston Churchill Fellowships, allowing senior departmental officers and rangers to participate in courses and study tours in the United States, played a major part in developing New Zealand expertise in national park management. During the 1970s New Zealand was exporting its skills in planning and management. Senior rangers and departmental officers, working under aid programmes, contributed to national park development in Nepal, Peru, and Western Samoa.

In the Centennial Year of National Parks in New Zealand we have fifteen superb reserves, if the Maritime Parks are included (and they are well worthy of inclusion) and if we assume the gazettal of Paparoa National Park during the year. New Zealand has an international reputation for its parks system, its management skills, and the citizen/government partnership it has invented.

Future challenge

Coincidentally, the Centennial year is also a year of major administrative change representing an enormous creative opportunity. The establishment of the Department of Conservation has the potential to carry the citizen/government partnership into new

dimensions of progress. A major challenge of the adjustment which must take place will be to ensure that the great achievement in national park and reserve development and administration, the outcome of a hundred years of historical development and effort, is carried forward within new structures.

The Centennial alone would justify profoundly creative thinking about where we are going, but the new Department, at a stage when its style, and its long term objectives are both being shaped, must make a major effort to define long term goals, and the short term objectives within the goals.

A number of the short term goals are very obvious. The Protected Natural Areas Programme represents the vital component of the future landscape. Large areas of the country have already lost their 'signature'; their visual affirmation of distinctive evolution. The P.N.A. programme has been hailed as an initiative which lies at the leading edge of applied biogeography — it must be completed without delay.

Something surely must be done about our sorry performance in the area of marine reservation. The diversity of the New Zealand coastline and its adjacent water mirrors the diversity of the land — there is a potential here for a protected system which will enhance productivity while according to the conservation, scientific and educa-

tional values of the coastline the status they must have.

Wilderness and wild rivers both represent programmes which, like protected natural areas, must be carried forward with determination, if balance is to be maintained and further losses avoided.

But to address the long term future, we need on the one hand to re-assess the very great importance of the heritage of unique nature in New Zealand, and on the other to acknowledge the inescapable link between culture and land policy. What is needed is a national inventory and valuing process, region by region, with as wide a participation as can be possibly obtained. Only through such a major effort will we be able to lift our sights and our horizons a level approaching the cultural vision which informed the gifting of Tongariro National Park by Te Heuheu Tukino and his people in 1887. ♣

David Thom, NPRA chairman since 1981, was a member of previous National Park Authorities and has served in national parks administrations since 1969. His book Heritage — the parks of the people — about the history of national parks in New Zealand, and the people and perceptions that are a part of that history, will be published in September/October.