KARANGARUA - WAIKUKUPA - OKARITO

"... its grey sand and shingle are without human footprints, its gentler streams and terrible rivers flow down to the Tasman, bringing out to sea, in the heavy freshes, uprooted trees, tossing and turning on the rushing flood, only to be brought back and left high and dry by the tide, their bare uplifted branches, bleached white, making a barrier for the drifting sands, until they at last are buried. Then, the long stretch of grey sand, with its while lines of surf surging in, is left deserted - no one to see its depressing aspect on the grey days, or its sparkling beauty when they are clear and blue. What, one wonders, will the next hundred years add to the history of that lonely coast?"

M. V. Mueller in "My Dear Bannie"

4.1. LANDFORMS

This area exhibits the most dramatic landforms in all of Westland. The Southern Alps rise to almost 3500m above myriad névés, glaciers, gorged rivers and glacial outwash features. As a result of extremely rapid uplift on the south-east side of the Alpine Fault, erosion is very rapid and detritus has been deposited during the Ice Ages and since as a complex of moraines and gravel plains. Even today this erosion is severe in places, e.g. the detritus from the upper Waitangitaona which caused the river to change its course in 1967 and flow into Lake Wahapo, modifying its ecology and causing widespread mortality of kahikitea forest at the head of the lake.

The Pleistocene Glaciations swept the landscape clear of vegetation and upon the retreat of the major glaciers, the deepest troughs remained as a chain of lakes - Mueller, Alpine, Mapourika and Wahapo to name the largest - locked among the forested moraines. Of particular interest are the morainic features remaining from the last Otiran glacial advance; the best known is the forest-covered Waiho Loop straddling the Tartare Stream in Waiho Valley below Franz Josef.

At the coastline the huge depth of outwash gravels (e.g. Waikukupa Piedmont) is often cut into steep cliffs. Another feature of the coastline is the number of lagoons (e.g. Okarito, 3-Mile) with their fringe of lateral moraine.

4.2. VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Within this region the podocarp forests of Westland are at their most extensive, dominating the swamps, terraces and river valleys; beech forest is absent, except in the Karangarua Valley. Rather than a forest "bushline" below the subalpine region is dominated by a dense, almost impenetrable, scrub of low forest associations of Olearia, Dracophyllum, Coprosma, Hoheria, etc. This belt gives way to the important mid-altitude forests on the steeper mountain slopes, of rata/kamahi/Hall's totara, often with an attractive over-storey of Mountain Cedar, (Libocedrus bidwillii).

On the steeper slopes throughout the morainic piedmont country (e.g. much of Waikukupa S.F.) there are variants of the three-tiered rimu/kamahi/Blechnum forest. These mixed forests grade into the common, and attractive

dense rimu forest on the gley podzol soils (poor drainage) on the terraces below 400m. On the most recent soils on the river flats the rimu is largely replaced by huge kahikatea up to 50m in height. Kahikatea is also often the dominant tree around swamps, especially fertile swamps where it makes a magnificent backdrop to the flax fringe. Swamps and pakihis at all stages of development abound throughout the area, many showing different stages involving colonisation of the bog by manuka, silver pine and rimu.

The bird life of the forests is prolific and the lagoons - especially Okarito where over 50 different bird species have been recorded - are renowned. The white heron, or Kotukutuku, has its only breeding ground on the lagoon near the mouth of the Waitangiroto.

Introduced animals (red deer, chamois and thar) are well established in the higher regions where they have severely modified the subalpine vegetation; they are also established in the lowland forest of the piedmont hills but their influence is not great. However, opossums are still spreading south throughout the region and are having a severe impact on the kamahi, rata and fuchsia in the forests. There are also goats in the Omoeroa area.

4.3. Exploration History

The region has always held a romantic aura for explorers. The two main historical attractions were (a) gold and (b) the twin glaciers, Franz Josef and Fox.

Okarito was the site of one of the great West Coast gold rushes, in 1865. By mid-1866 it was a major West Coast town serving possibly nearly 10,000 working the blacksand beaches as far south as Gillespies for gold. Okarito lagoon became the most important harbour in South Westland but by the 1880's the blacksand gold boom had completely died away. Over the next 20 years many imaginative schemes were used to trace the gold back into the source streams such as McDonald Stream and the Tartare, Callery, Waikukupa and Cook Rivers.

Tourism came early to the region. Batson's "Hotel" was built at Waiho in 1896 to be replaced by a more substantial hotel in 1908. The reputation of Franz Josef, as it is now known, grew under the management of the brothers, Alex and Peter Graham - probably the most famous names of the guided climbing period in New Zealand. Once again, the mountain valleys had been explored and mapped by Charlie Douglas. He was probably the first to explore the Fox Glacier in 1868, and in 1892 explored the Copland valley and located Copland Pass, the important alpine route to the Hermitage. He was joined by the mountaineer A. P. Harper in 1893 and together they explored the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, Cook and Karangarua valleys over the next few years.

4.4. Recreational Attractions

The névés of the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers provide some of the outstanding mountaineering and ski-touring experiences in New Zealand. The glaciers, with their complex cycles of advance and retreat and their proximity to the lowland forests, are a major recreational attraction for both New Zealanders and overseas visitors. Largely in recognition of this scenic grandeur, the glaciers and their mountain hinterland plus some of the lakes in the piedmont, were designated as scenic reserves long ago, and finally formally amalgamated into the 100,000 ha Westland National Park in 1960. Yet the myriad scenic recreational and scientific features in the piedmont and coastal forests were not recognised and were excluded from the National Park. Since that time the debate on the value of these vast forests of Waikukupa, Okarito and Karangarua - for commercial forestry or preservation - has been continued. The recreational attractions of this coastal country, except for Okarito and its environs, have remained unpublicised in guidebook

and tourist itinerarys. Yet the coast is the perfect complement to the Southern Alps - in scenery, history and in the scientific values associated with its landforms of glacial origin. It is in this region that the fascinating glacial history of the West Coast landscape is best expressed; it is this unity of glacier and gorge, moraine and terrace, forest and soil, swamp, lake, lagoon and coastline which is probably the most outstanding recreational and educational resource in all the West Coast.

Because of its potential as a wilderness area it should be managed in concert with the Hooker Wilderness. The middle reaches of the Karangarua are popular with hunters and warrant an appropriate level of hutting and tracking. The Douglas hut is mainly patronised by hunting parties flown into this remote valley. The future of the hut has been the subject of considerable debate already. The noise of the air traffic is quite incompatible with wilderness, yet there is a need to facilitate the control of thar in the area. In fact, the basic management problem associated with public usage of Westland National Park is tourist aircraft.

The Westland National Park Board need to urgently attempt to bring about a consensus among all Park users regarding zones where low-level flying is excluded and zones where tourist flights make minimal impact on the enjoyment of other Park users. The Balfour should be left in an undeveloped state yet the adjacent intensive use of the Katies Col airstrip for tourists visiting the Fox névé is a serious intrusion into an otherwise peaceful area; likewise the use of the Geikie Snowfield above the Franz Josef Glacier and the Whymper Glacier at the head of the Whataroa River impinge upon the wilderness quality of the Callery catchment. Naturally, many climbers wish to fly to Pioneer Hut below Douglas Peak at the head of Franz Josef Glacier and the aerial view of the two great névés is an unforgettable sight for all Park visitors. Nevertheless, the existing situation is far from satisfactory and until a suitable pattern of zonation is determined it is premature to talk of real wilderness areas in Westland National Park.

4.5. ZONING

4.5.1. WILDERNESS

Upper Karangarua/Douglas and Callery/Tartare "Wildernesses".

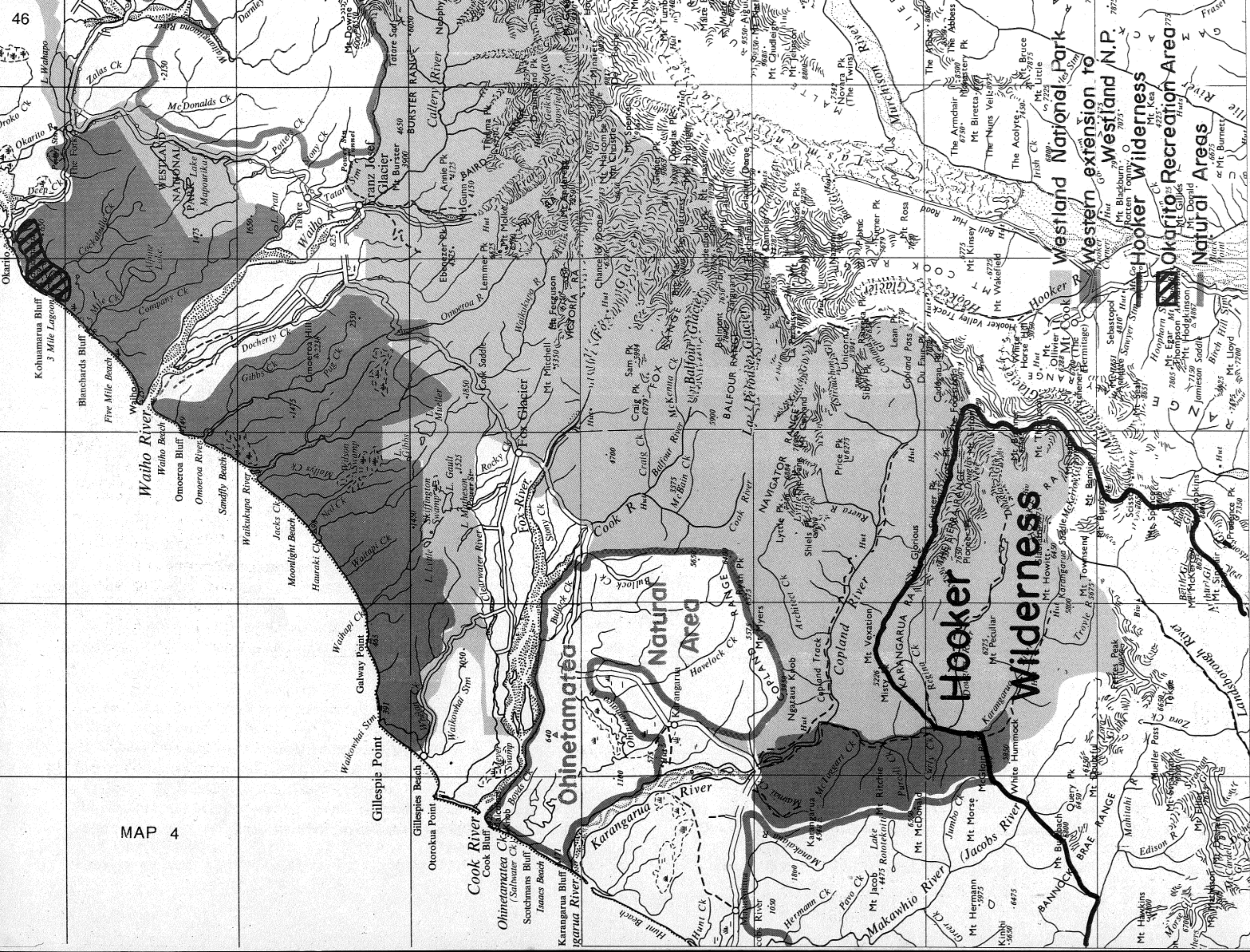
The wilderness value of this small portion of Westland National Park has already been discussed in Chapter 3.

4.5.2. NATURAL AREAS

(1) Ohinetamatea Natural Area (map 4)

The Ohinetamatea is a deep, slow river which meanders back and forth between old parallel lateral moraines of the former "Cook" and "Karangarua" Glaciers. The Cook and Karangarua are wild, glacier-fed rivers; in contrast, the Ohinetamatea spends much of its length in a major swamp and the remainder flowing across a forest-covered plain with tall kahikatea lining the banks. While canoeing the Cook and Karangarua Rivers may be a more exciting experience, neither give the intimate contact with swamp and forest that is the unique recreational experience of the Ohinetamatea. It is one of the outstanding scenic and recreational features of the region, offering good fishing and probably the only river in Westland that can be canoed back upstream to the point of embarkation near S.H.6.

This area received a very high scenic ranking in the South Westland Land Use Study. The coastline is a series of bluffs and beaches with an old pack track between the mouth of the Cook River and Boyds Creek (over Cook Bluff); this track is still used but the track down the south bank of the Ohinetamatea is mainly overgrown. It is difficult to do a round trip on foot since the Ohinetamatea estuary is deep and swift - which only accentuates the attraction of the area for canoe travel.


Westland National Park
Western extension to Westland N.P.
Hooker Wilderness
Okarito Recreation Area
Natural Areas
Hooker Wilderness
Ohinetamatea Natural Area
WESTLAND NATIONAL PARK
Waiho River
Cook River
Gillespie Point
Franz Josef Glacier
Fox Glacier
Copland River
Karangarua River
Okarito
Mt Cook

MAP 4

(2) Lowland extension to Westland National Park - Waikukupa and Southern Okarito State forests (map 4)

Few proposals for an extension to an existing national park have received more study and debate in recent years than the Waikukupa / Southern Okarito proposal. The Native Forest Action Council (NFAC) in their two submissions (1976, 1977) to the National Parks Authority, assembled a well-documented case resting primarily on the scenic and scientific - and to a lesser extent the recreational and historic - values of the two forests. There really is no argument about the proposal meeting national park criteria; the problem lies in the desire of the N.Z. Forest Service to use the podocarp forests of Waikukupa State forest south of Hauraki Creek, and Southern Okarito State Forest to meet future requirements of the South Westland indigenous timber industry (primarily that based at Whataroa). The scenic, recreational and historic case for the addition of the two areas to the Westland National Park is very strong.

Complementary nature of Waikukupa and Southern Okarito

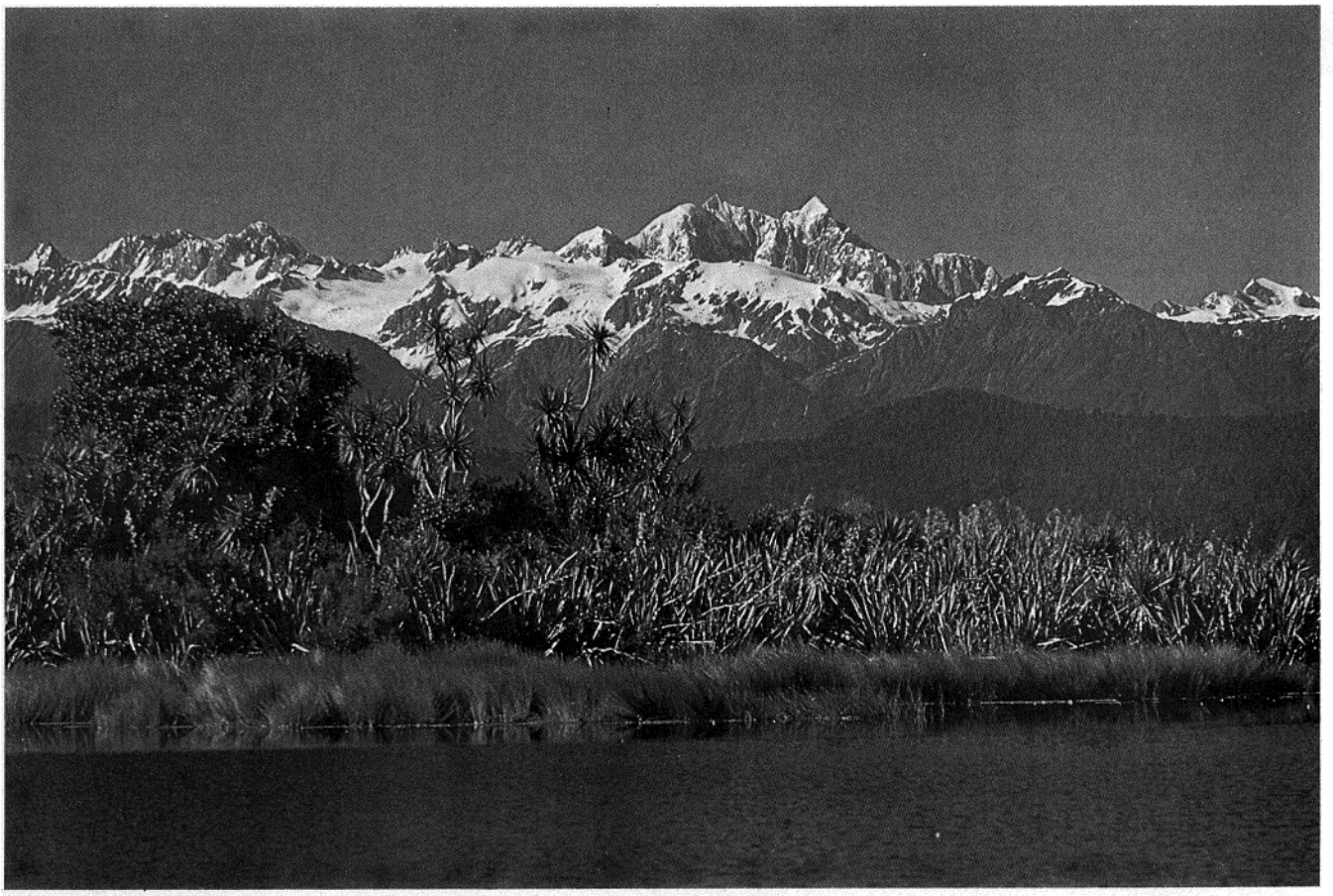
Despite the different scenic and recreational rankings given by the South Westland Land Use Study to the blocks of piedmont country between Abut Head and the Karangarua River, there is a very high scenic quality to all of this country when viewed from the coastline. On scenic and recreational grounds there is little to choose between Waikukupa and Southern Okarito; both would make outstanding extensions to the existing park. To a large extent the two blocks are complementary: Waikukupa has wilderness qualities with dense rimu forest on the young outwash fan behind Gillespies and a central core of pakihi, swamp and ancient moraines on the Waikukupa plateau. Southern Okarito is more strategically situated for recreational development since it does not have the remoteness of Waikukupa; it has definite historical associations, easy walks, coastal lagoons, good road access and the proximity of a holiday village at Okarito township.

Limit recreational development in Waikukupa forest

Possibly the highest priority for Waikukupa is for the Crown to obtain easy public access to Waiho Beach, then perhaps one or two bridges to facilitate a coastal walk. However, Waikukupa should be left unhutted and primarily in an undeveloped state. If walkways are to be formed they are much more appropriate in Southern Okarito. The interior of the Waikukupa piedmont has wilderness qualities but the straightforward walking route from S.H.6. down the Waikukupa River to the coast is sufficient natural access. At the southern end of Waikukupa, however, there would be value in forming a track to give a round route: Gillespies - coastline to Galway Point - along forest-covered lateral moraines, past Lake Lyttle to Lake Matheson . On a good track most visitors would accomplish this trip easily in a day. Gillespies Beach has its history too - eleven stores and several hundred people in 1366; a gold dredge even worked there from 1930 to 1945.

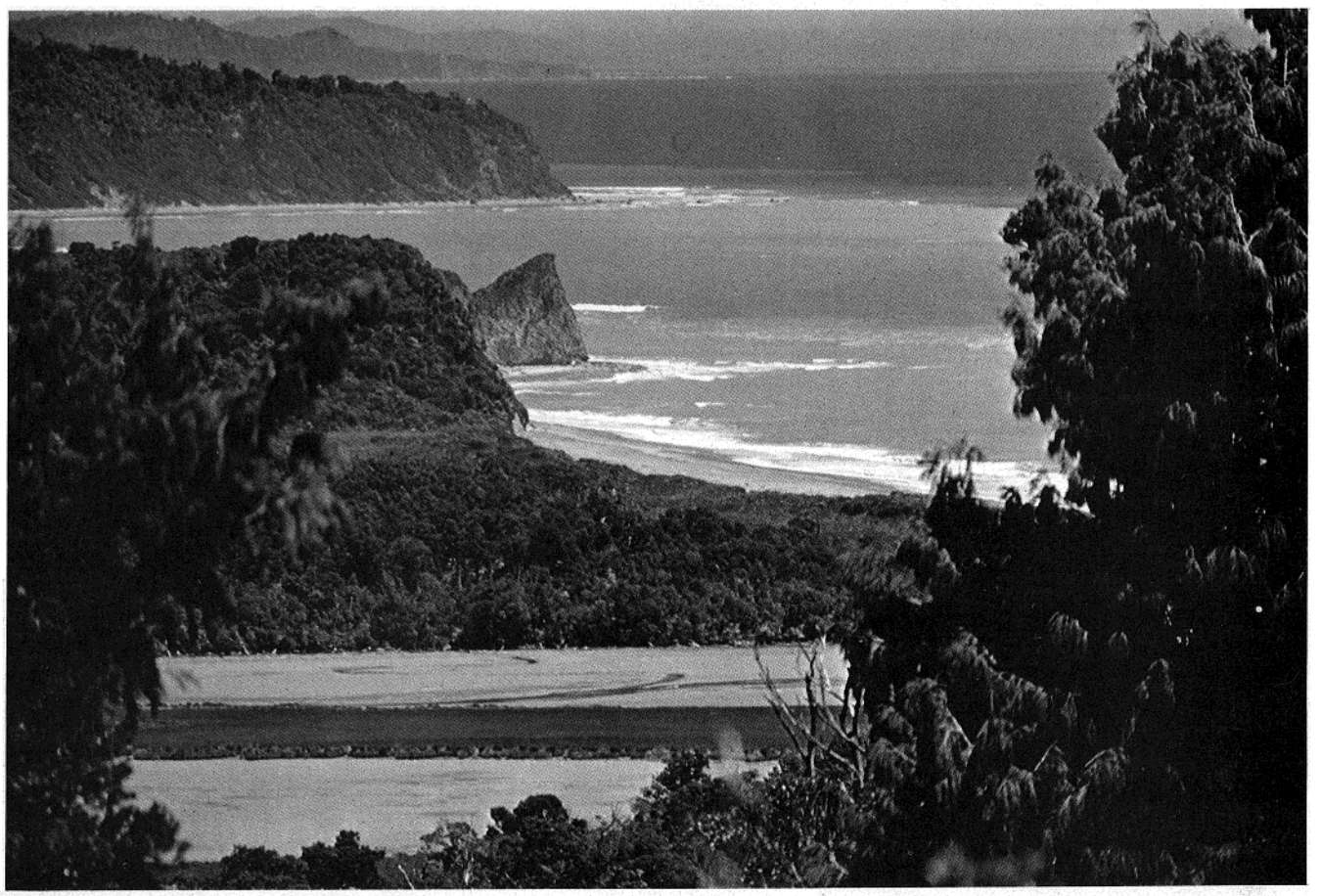
Okarito Forest - more suitable for recreational development

The immediate environs of Okarito village are zoned as recreation area (maps 4 & 5); Okarito could be developed as a splendid low cost tourist centre catering for recreation on the lagoon (canoeing, whitebaiting, bird watching), along the coastline and in the forest hinterland. Park visitors could follow in the footsteps of explorers and gold prospectors along the coastline. There is a well developed coastal walking track (recently upgraded by the N.Z. Forest Service) in Southern Okarito already - along the cliffside via the Okarito Trig and down to the sandy beach near 3-Mile and 5-Mile Lagoons.



Mts Tasman and Cook from Okarito coastline.

Guy Salmon



Southern Okarito and Waikukupa coastline from Kohuamarua Bluff.

Guy Salmon

Because of its rugged terrain, tramping and walking is not well catered for in the existing Westland National Park. Yet Southern Okarito has the potential for such recreation. An old benched miners' track enters Southern Okarito near Lake Pratt beside the Waiho Loop and climbs along the ridge above Lake Mapourika to descend to Alpine Lake. It is in need of some clearing and remarking but would provide splendid views of the forested Loop and the Waiho flats for tourists staying at the T.H.C. hotel. The development of a campsite at Alpine Lake would make a break for the two-day trip to the Coast. Beyond Alpine Lake the track swings northward across Cockabulla Creek, then winds amongst the interesting moraines to join the Forks - Okarito road near Tidal Creek. Throughout the route there are opportunities for splendid views of the Franz Josef Glacier and the Tasman Sea.

There is plenty of scope for a moderate amount of interconnecting track formation (e.g. from Alpine Lake out to 5-Mile Lagoon via the old gold-sluicing pipeline through rimu, silver pine and kahikatea forest; track down Cockabulla Creek to 3-Mile Lagoon; short track to Lake Miro.)

In F.M.C's opinion, one of the saddest features of Westland National Park is the apparent antipathy of a large section of the West Coast population towards the park concept; an estimated 350,000 tourists pass through Franz Josef per annum, yet hardly any of them are encouraged to experience the lowland topography by the commercial tour operators. If the younger, more adventurous tourists, plus family groups who do not want luxury accommodation, could be catered for at Okarito the benefits would be two-fold:

(a) the natural history of the forested lowlands could be appreciated - with the assistance of a ranger/interpretation centre at Okarito on the edge of the Park;

(b) a local tourist industry could be established which would encourage people to stay several days and experience that part of the park (which generally has much better weather than Franz Josef).

Historical features of Okarito

There are historic features which increase the region's appeal:

- obelisk marking the discovery of New Zealand by Abel Tasman in 1642;
- the Ngai tahu pa where 7,500,000 acres of the West Coast was bought for £300 by James McKay in 1861;
- the Ngati Wairongi pa near Kohuamarua Bluff (near 3-Mile Lagoon);
- the gold rush era in the mid-1860's; a "watering hole" of Charles Douglas, James Docherty and other famous explorers;
- the main gold diggings were near 3-Mile and 5-Mile Lagoons; in fact this was the early "Coast road" with ferrymen at strategic points;
- old pipeline from Alpine Lake used for sluicing at 5-Mile Lagoon.

4.6. Impact of National Park Proposals on Indigenous Forestry

The conservation proposals illustrated in maps 4 and 5 would considerably reduce the resource of terrace and hill country podocarp forests available to the timber industry, but would preserve the dense, high volume rimu on the post-glacial terraces between Gillespies and Hauraki Creek. Northern Okarito State forest, the remainder of Waitangi State forest, Waikukupa State forest south of the Gillespies - Cook River road and parts of Karangarua State forest (excluding most of the Ohinetametea), and some parts of the smaller Hunts Beach, Makawhio and Bruce Bays State forests could be selectively

logged. The exact extent of logging is going to require considerable refinement by N.Z. Forest Service of forest volumes but, in the interim, government has placed the forests south of the Karangarua River under a logging moratorium (West Coast Forest Policy, 1978), to allow the assessment of reserve requirements by 31.3.1980.

The timber resource of Southern Okarito will be disputed. However, F.M.C's view on the higher priority for national park status was made quite clear in the following quotes from a letter of 11.8.1977 to the National Parks Authority.

> *"As pointed out in our earlier submission, F M C were conscious that the podocarp forests of Southern Okarito may have been essential to sustained-yield forestry based on terrace podocarps in South Westland. However, we pointed out our grave concern that the famous view from Okarito Trig could be spoiled, particularly by partial logging of the hill country forests behind Cockabulla, Jenkins and 5-Mile Creeks.*
>
> *A study of the South Westland Land Use Study Report, the paper on regional podocarp supplies by G.P.S. Allan and R.E.J. Wylie, and the indigenous forest production map has assisted us in placing the timber resource of Southern Okarito in perspective. Firstly, FMC are opposed to the transportation of round-wood from South Westland to North Westland for processing - just as we imagine that the local forest industry would be opposed to such a course of action. Accepting the recent modifications because of the Saltwater ecological reserve proposal, this means that the average life of the South Westland timber industry is 23 years. At the end of this period the annual cut from sustained-yield of terrace podocarp will be 25,400m3, or enough for one major sawmill in the region. FMC do not see the national interest being served by the Okuru and Waiho sawmills lasting beyond this 23 year period. Paynters Mill at Whataroa would seem to be the obvious centre for the indigenous forest industry based on sustained-yield. The continued existence of the Harihari mills is a problem, but we believe that it could be solved by a combination of:*
>
> - *an immediate, rapid establishment of an exotic forest in much of the 6,000 hectares of cutover moraine country in Ianthe State forest and Wanganui State forest. This forest would need to be carefully situated to preserve the indigenous character of the region when viewed from State Highway 6.*
> - *the haulage of some exotics from the region north of Ross during the 1990's before the Ianthe / Wanganui exotics mature.*

Bridge over Five Mile Creek

A study of the "indigenous forest production" map of the South Westland Land Use Study shows that most of Southern Okarito is only of medium quality for sustained-yield - compared with the large area of high quality in Northern Okarito. Much of this medium quality forest must be hill country and therefore required to be partially logged (with extraction of 50 - 80% of the merchantable podocarp volume). Such a course of action would be unacceptable to our membership and we would oppose it since it must seriously impair the view from Okarito Trig, let alone recreational value of the forest itself.

In summary then, FMC believe that the preservation of Southern Okarito would not have a significant impact upon the long term viability of an environmentally acceptable indigenous forest industry in central-south Westland".

4.7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Westland National Park Board attempt to manage the Upper Karangarua, Douglas, Balfour, Callery and Tartare Catchments to retain their wilderness character.

Further, the restriction of tourist aircraft to well-defined zones around the Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers is a high-priority management requirement.

2. That those portions of Waikukupa and Southern Okarito State forests shown in map 4 be added to Westland National Park.

Further, that Waikukupa not be intensively developed for recreation but that Southern Okarito, particularly around Okarito village and trig, be a centre for more intensive park recreation and historical interpretation.

3. That the middle and lower reaches of the Ohinetamatea River (see map 4) be managed as a natural area by the N.Z. Forest Service.

While this may not preclude some limited selection logging in the adjoining Karangarua State forest, it would require the recreational and scientific values of the river to be maintained in its present natural state.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

LANDFORMS:

N.Z. Geological Survey, D.S.I.R. 1968; "Geological Map of N.Z." Sheet 20 (Mt. Cook), 1:250,000

Sara, W.A. 1970: Glaciers of Westland National Park. N.Z. D.SI.R. Info. Series 75. 47 pp.

Wardle, P. 1973: Variation of the Glaciers of Westland National Park and the Hooker Range, N.Z. N.Z. J. Botany 11: 349 - 88.

VEGETATION:

Wardle, P. 1977: Plant communities of Westland National Park and neighbouring lowland and coastal areas. N.Z. J. Botany 15: 323 - 98.

CONSERVATION:

Botany Division D.S.I.R., 1976: Proposals for seaward extensions to Westland National Park with discussion of landforms and vegetation. 22 pp. (plus appendices).

McCaskill, L.W. Ed. 1966: Handbook to the Westland National Park. 79 pp. (+ map).

Native Forests Action Council, 1976: Submissions to the National Parks Authority on proposed additions to Westland National Park. 23 pp. (+ maps).

Native Forests Action Council, 1977: Second submission to the National Parks Authority on extensions to Westland National Park. 18 pp. (+ map).

Wardle, P. 1976: Mountains-to-the-sea in Westland National Park. N.Z. Alpine Journal 29: 60 - 2.

RECREATION:

Leonard, J.H.; Lowe, D.R. 1961: The Callery. N.Z. Alpine Journal 19: 116 - 48.

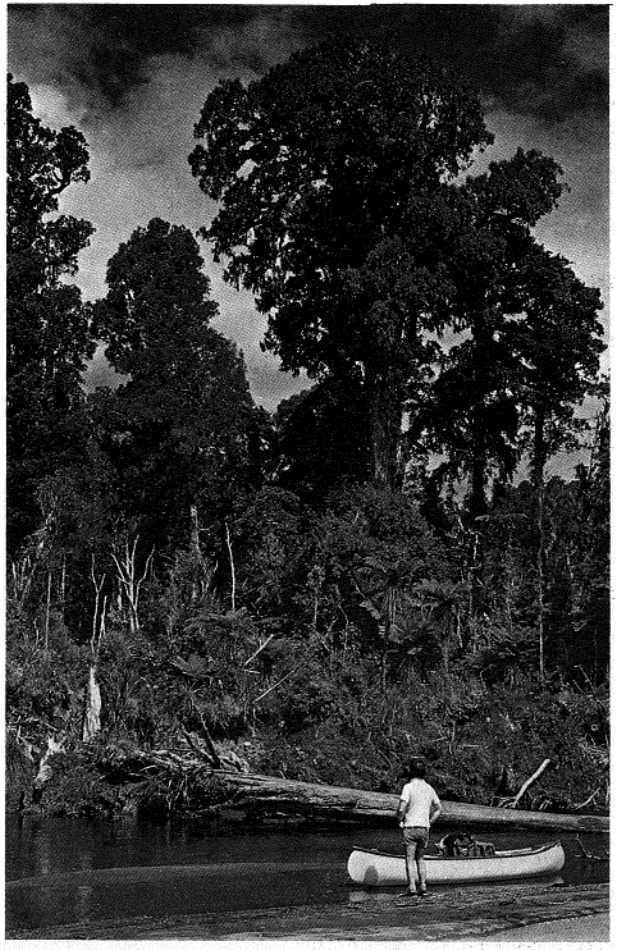
Harper, A.P. 1946: Memories of mountains & men. 208 pp.

HISTORY:

Bishop, Jane; Walker M. 1976: Westland County : a Centennial History, 166 pp.

Mueller, M.V. (Ed.), 1958: "My Dear Bannie : Gerhard Mueller's letters from the West Coast, 1865-66". Pegasus, Christchurch, 238 pp.

Westland National Park Board, 1978: "The Franz Josef Glacier : a photographic record".



Rimu and Kahikatea forest, Ohinetamatea River.

N.Z. Forest Service