



NORTH WESTLAND

Sunset, Porarari Gorge, Western Paparoa Range

Les Molloy

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES OF NORTH WESTLAND

"The human species of the Inangahua district deserve as much, if not greater, consideration of their place in the "ecology" as do the scientists' bugs, moss and insects."

Letter from Inangahua County Council to West Coast United Council, January 1979.

North Westland is defined in this publication as that part of the West Coast lying between the Hokitika catchment in the south and the Heaphy catchment in the north. Whereas South Westland is predominantly a narrow strip of land between mountain crest and coastline, North Westland includes major inland basins such as the Grey - Inangahua Depression and the valleys of the Maruia - Buller River system. Of the 35,000 people living on the West Coast, 86% live in North Westland, primarily in the four urban centres of Hokitika, Greymouth, Reefton and Westport.

In contrast to South Westland, North Westland has lost much of its natural character through 120 years of settlement. The flood-plain forests, formerly kahikatea or totara/matai with an admixture of red or silver beech, were felled to make way for agriculture. Later, the dense terrace podocarp forests (generally rimu with 10-15% miro) were logged, sometimes clearfelled. However, vast areas of beech forest (red, hard and silver) remained, particularly in the montane valleys of the Upper Grey, Inangahua, Maruia and Buller Rivers. Elsewhere, gold and coalmining took its toll of the landscape. Today the Coast goldrushes are only dim memories, but the relics remain as a vast historical resource, a source of outdoor recreation for West Coasters and visitors alike.

6.1. INDIGENOUS FORESTRY IN NORTH WESTLAND

By the late 1960's it was becoming increasingly apparent that the future supply of podocarp forest for the sawmilling industry was extremely limited. The N.Z. Forest Service proposed (October 1971 White Paper) to utilise the vast remaining areas of previously unmerchantable beech forest of North Westland - both as a source of sawlogs to replace podocarps and as the basis of a large industrial utilisation complex (pulp mill). The original proposal involved converting to pine 37,000 ha of hill country podocarp/hardwood forest and 50,000 ha of beech forest; in addition, another 110,000 ha of beech forest were to be managed for sustained yield of beech by regeneration felling (1).

The proposals received widespread public opposition, especially from scientific, conservation and recreation groups. The tortuous early history of the controversy is far too involved to detail here, but the salient developments between 1974 and 1977 can be summarised as follows:

- announcement of a revised indigenous forest policy at the November 1974 Forest Development Conference. Henceforth, indigenous forest could not be converted to exotics without a demonstrated national or local need;
- failure of large-scale beech pulp proposals; May 1975 announcement of Jaako Poyry study of combined West Coast/Nelson forests;
- Hokitika Seminar, July 1977; release of South Westland Land Use Study, Jaako Poyry report, and details of ecological reserves proposed by Scientific Co-ordinating Committee.

Protection of recreational features

Throughout the period 1973 - 1977, the N.Z. Forest Service maintained that important recreational features (tracks, vistas, rivers, etc.) in the beech scheme would be preserved. Assurances were given that the recreational and historical resources of the forests would be assessed and publicly documented. Unfortunately, nothing has been published as yet.

The protection of the recreational resource of North Westland - particularly the montane "finger valleys" - was the prime concern of FMC during this period. Early attempts at documenting recreational values and usage were summarised as follows in the invited submission to the Minister of Forests following the Hokitika Seminar in 1977 (2):

"The Federation Executive has shown a deep concern for forestry management throughout New Zealand and took an active part in the 1969 and 1974 Forestry Development Conferences. The original N.Z. Forest Service proposal to utilise the South Island Beech Forests (October 1971 Report) was immediately studied by the Federation and submissions were made to the Nature Conservation Council and the N.Z. Forest Service. A further more comprehensive submission (3) was made to NZFS in October 1972 outlining, in particular, the detrimental impact of the early proposals upon the "finger valleys" of the upper Buller and Maruia. After further discussions with the NZFS and inspections of the forests, a detailed submission (4) on recreational usage of the forests was given to NZFS in June 1973. On the basis of this documentation in July 1973 NZFS agreed to withdraw two (and part of two other) of the most popular valleys from the scheme - the Matakaitaki, Glenroy, Clear Grey and Robinson. Since that time, the Federation has maintained a continuing interest in the various forestry proposals for the West Coast" (2).

6.2. FMC VIEWS ON FUTURE INDIGENOUS FORESTRY IN NORTH WESTLAND

Following the Hokitika Seminar on "The future of Forestry and the Forest Industry on the West Coast", the Minister of Forests invited the public to make submissions to him on all the complex forestry issues discussed at the week-long meeting. Excerpts from the FMC submission (2) on these complex social, economic and environmental aspects of indigenous forestry are quoted below, particularly as they concern the three subregions of North Westland (Buller, Inangahua, and Grey/Hokitika).

6.2.1. BULLER SUBREGION (Karamea - Westport - Charleston)

"We believe that there is no option but that of a gradual reduction in indigenous saumilling in this isolated subregion. However, we consider that a mix of the following options could be used to alleviate the shortfall, viz:

- reduce the level of cut in these indigenous forests,
- reduce the area and volume of proposed riparian strips and green belts,
- include beech sawlogs as part of the permissible cut.

We support the reserve proposals for this region and note that most have recreational importance. There is also a need for a further reserve in the Karamea district, probably the Oparara basin. We also draw attention to the need for protection of the forests at the end of the Wangapeka Track in the Little Wanganui River valley presently being milled. Our conclusion is that the Buller region is geographically isolated and must survive on its own timber resource. It is inevitable that some of the smaller mills must close. It seems desirable for the NZFS to bring about amalgamation of some of the smaller mills and

give the security of long-term cutting rights to the consolidated industry. The quid pro quo would be a reduced rate of cut to eke out the indigenous resource. For social reasons, a low level of indigenous milling should continue, preferably on a sustained yield basis in the Karamea area.

Although suitable areas for exotic plantings are scarce, the need to establish further exotic plantations is vital to the sawmilling industry of this region. These plantations, would, of course, partially fill the demands of a labour force unemployed by the closing down of the existing sawmills. It seems essential for those mills logging the Mokihinui and Charleston forests to be transferred to exotics as soon as possible.

We would draw your attention to the wide recreational attractions of this area and the increasing number of visitors using the N.W. Nelson Forest Park. The Heaphy and Wangapeka Tracks are receiving greater use by trampers than ever before. It is also possible that the agricultural, coal and fishing industries may expand and so create additional jobs in this region."
(2)

6.2.2. INANGAHUA SUBREGION (Inangahua - Maruia - Matakītaki - Upper Grey)

"We have suggested that there is a need for the State to assist in the development of small industries in Reefton to utilise beech waste wood. The Federation accepts that logging of some of the beech forest to supply beech and the minor podocarp element to North Westland region may be necessary.

The finger valleys of the Victoria and Brunner Ranges, Upper Buller, Upper Grey and Maruia Rivers are valuable virgin and scenic areas frequently used by Federation members. The recreational value of these areas have been high-lighted in our earlier submissions.

The secondary roads in the Mangles, Tutaki, Matakītaki-Maruia Saddle and Upper Grey areas all contain scenery of the quality of that along S.H.65 in the Maruia Valley. The overall character of the region is that of a pleasant mixture of farming on the river terraces with a beech forest backdrop and fringe to the waterways. Logging operations and timber traffic would seriously detract from this scenic character. Furthermore, the cost of long distances of roading in this difficult terrain, peripheral to the main area of the beech utilisation scheme, could well be very high.

The valleys of the Upper Grey and Upper Maruia are of high scenic and recreational value and are often used as access routes to the Southern Alps between the Taramakau and Lewis Pass. The only montane valley specifically excluded from the West Coast beech utilisation scheme is that of Lake Daniells and the Alfred River. Indeed, N.Z. Forest Service has been party to discussions on the incorporation of this valley in an extended Nelson Lakes National Park which could extend south to Lewis Pass and include the outstanding Maruia Scenic Reserve of beech forest.

Many of the other montane valleys in the Upper Buller, Maruia or Upper Grey region warrant National Park or Forest Park status.

The Upper Grey is of such outstanding scenery that it should not be included in the beech utilisation scheme. We would urge that the Lake Sumner Forest Park be extended westwards to include the unoccupied Crown land tops and those forests out to the Alpine Fault depression as a logical geographical boundary. This would include the Brown Grey, Clear Grey (including scenic Lake Christabel), the Robinson, Tass, Nancy, Waiheke, Tutaeke, Trent and Haupiri valleys. To preserve the natural environment of the Upper Grey and Upper Ahaura Rivers it would be

necessary to exclude all conversion and clear-felling from these areas". (N.B. This earlier suggestion of extending Lake Sumner State Forest Park is the same, in effect, as the "Maruia State Forest Park" proposed in Chapter 8.)

"At the Hokitika Seminar, the N.Z. Forest Service only briefly mentioned these recreational values and the Federation now awaits the final detailed "sieve planning" by NZFS to indicate and protect the most important of the recreational and historical parts of this subregion. However, we wish to congratulate those NZFS officers who, to date, have made such an effort in identifying the historical resources of the beech project area - particularly the mining tracks, gold batteries, tramways, old mills and ghost towns. It is our belief that these will constitute a major recreational, educational and cultural resource which could be interpreted to the public by the Forest Service at the same time as they interpret indigenous forest (beech) management. Most of this historical resource is centred on Reefton and if the local population give it their full support then it could become a source of tourist income built upon local pride in their pioneer history." (2)

6.2.3. GREY - HOKITIKA SUBREGION (Mid Grey - Taramakau - Ross)

This subregion "is the problem area for timber supply and we note that there is a high percentage of long-term cutting rights there already. FMC believe that it is important to sustain the industry in this region because it will be the main centre of exotic logging when these forests mature in the 1990's. There appear to be two options, after bridging some of the gap by:

- reducing the level of cut;
- partially logging the riparian strips;
- including beech sawlogs in the region.

These two options are as follows:

- (a) bringing in a large proportion of the beech and podocarp of the Inangahua subregion (in particular the Inangahua Valley, Mawheraiti Valley and Tawhai and Hukawai S.F. s) for sawing;
- (b) transporting to the north a small proportion of the South Westland subregion podocarps.

FMC would prefer to see a mix of these two options, thereby leaving the region's reserves intact. We note that the volume of podocarp timber in the reserves is only two years cutting at the present rate of cut. To sacrifice these for such short-term gain would be a monstrous environmental blunder." (2)

In summary then, the FMC viewpoint in September 1977 was that a compromise solution could be negotiated, involving:

- heavy utilisation of the beech/podocarp forests of the Inangahua/Mawheraiti to supply Buller subregion;
- a scaling down of indigenous forestry in the Buller subregion;
- the avoidance of milling red beech forest in the Maruia;
- the protection of the montane "finger valleys";
- the acceptance of the proposed "ecological reserves" in North Westland;
- a limited transference of podocarps from South Westland to the Hokitika area.

6.3. WEST COAST FOREST POLICY 1978

In August 1978, the Minister of Forests announced the West Coast Forest Policy (5), the government's attempt to achieve both a major re-structuring of the forest industry on the West Coast and the reservation of tracts of forest for scientific and recreational reasons. A number of aspects of the policy have major implications for outdoor recreation, particularly in North Westland. These are:

- (1) zoning of reserve and production areas;
- (2) State forest parks and related matters;
- (3) further procedure for public involvement.

(1) Zoning of reserve and production areas;

The policy made a major concession to West Coast opinion by deferring any firm decision on reserves. Furthermore, any uncertainty about the representativeness of the proposed North Westland ecological reserves was brushed aside by the designation, for planning purposes, of all other State forest as "production forest", viz:

"2. The proposed ecological areas and other proposed reserves and additions to national parks listed in the attached schedule will be placed under a logging moratorium until such time as the social, economic, and environmental impact of reservation has been investigated in relation to the total land use pattern. The investigation will be conducted by an officials' committee chaired by the Forest Service and will make recommendations to the Minister of Forests by 31 March 1979. When the above examination has been completed the ecological areas then decided will be gazetted and appropriate transfer of adjacent State forests to Westland National Park will be made. For recreational, scenic, historic or other cultural values only reserves of significant size and/or importance will be gazetted. Generally such requirements

will be satisfied simply by appropriate zoning in the forest management plan referred to under 33. (Some flexibility will be allowed in exchanging areas under moratorium for equivalent production forests prior to final decisions on reserves.)" (5)

"3. Merchantable or potentially merchantable indigenous and exotic forests north of the Cook River and not specifically under logging moratoria or existing protective status will be available for production and will constitute the minimum resource for planning the future of the West Coast industry including re-negotiation of existing contracts. Resources in areas under logging moratoria will not be included in calculations of available sawlog production before the end of 1979." (5)



LAKE HOCHSTETTER

A list of these proposed ecological reserves and amenity reserves under logging moratorium is given in the Appendix at the end of this document. One important feature of the policy is that the N.Z. Forest Service have recognised the recreational importance of many of the "finger valleys" - Ohikanui, Otututu, Upper Waitahu, Ahaura, etc. - by listing them as potential amenity reserves. Nevertheless, there are serious omissions such as Upper Grey River, Alexander River/Absolum Creek, Clarke River and Lower Waitahu River.

(2) State Forest Parks and related matters:

"28. Plans for a new State forest park embracing the Elliot, Victoria and Brunner Ranges, the Upper Grey River and the lowland forests between Ikamatua and Cronadun, with their associated goldfields, will be announced." (5)

Plans for a "Victoria State Forest Park" have now been announced by the NZFS and this proposal generally covers the area zoned as "Maruia State Forest Park" in map 6 and discussed in section 8.4.2b. It is expected that forest park status for these forests should markedly improve the management of their rich historic and recreational resource. To date, unfortunately, the Reefton district has languished as a remote (predominantly indigenous forest) corner of the Nelson Conservancy. Forest Park status should lead to a necessary improvement in local NZFS management, particularly if the Inangahua district is transferred to Westland Conservancy and its forests managed in concert with the vast recreational resource to the South.

"29. State forest park status, as well as open indigenous State forests, wilderness area and recreation area status, is regarded as a suitable form of administration for some selected State forests throughout the West Coast. The appropriate status of the Paparoa Range will require particular consideration in view of reserve investigations currently under way." (5)

The "reserve investigations currently under way" is a reference to the National Parks Authority's study of the potential national park values of the Punakaiki - Paparoa region. This important issue is dealt with in Chapter 9.5.

(3) Further procedure for public involvement:

"33. Following approval, the details of these general proposals will be set out in management plans for each subregion and published for public comment to conform with Section 26 of the Forests Act 1949." (5)

It is expected that draft management plans for North and South Westland will be made available for public comment shortly and their prescriptions for outdoor recreation management will be awaited with interest.

6.4. INDIGENOUS FORESTRY - THE NATIONAL/REGIONAL PLANNING CONFLICT

Just prior to the November 1978 General Election, the Minister of Forests, the Hon. Venn Young, announced that he was postponing for five years any decision on the NZFS proposal for an 83,000 ha wilderness area in N.W. Nelson State Forest Park (see Chapter 10 for a fuller discussion). The Minister's statement was made at an election meeting on the West Coast but it was a decision of nationwide significance. It was the latest in a series of postponements on politically-sensitive management proposals for the State Forests of the West Coast; these proposals have polarised local-national opinion to such an extent that the NZFS has often been frustrated in its attempts to implement the revised indigenous forest policy in the West Coast and achieve the "balanced use" of native forests required by the 1976 amendment to the Forests Act.

In the three years since the adoption of the revised policy, the West Coast sawmilling communities and local bodies have united in a diehard opposition to most forest preservation proposals put forward by the Conservation Movement and the NZFS (particularly the ecological reserve proposals of the Scientific Coordinating Committee). A brief resumé of events during this period shows the failure of government's attempts to achieve a compromise between local and national interests:

- July 1977 seminar on "West Coast Forestry and the future of West Coast Forest Industries"; strong local opposition to reserve proposals of NZFS;
- of the subsequent 269 submissions from the public to the Minister of Forests, most of the 157 from West Coast individuals or organisations expressed some opposition to the creation of a reserve network in the State Forests;
- local opposition to a study of the national park potential of the forests of the Punakaiki-Paparoa region;
- shortly after the submission to Parliament of the Maruia Declaration (341,000 signatures) seeking greater forest preservation, a counter-petition organised by a local group, West Coast Futures Inc., was presented (12,000 signatures) seeking full socio-economic impact studies of the NZFS reserve proposals;
- the August 1978 West Coast Forest Policy (5) largely acceded to West Coast opinion with regard to the reserve proposals; the proposed ecological and amenity reserves were deemed to be a maximum and all other merchantable forests, at that point in time, were considered production forests. However, no firm decisions were made to gazette these reserves. A development-oriented officials committee (chaired by NZFS) was set up to assess "... the social, economic and environmental impact of reservation ... in relation to the total land use pattern ..." (5) In particular,

the committee was charged with evaluating the forestry, agriculture, mineral and hydro-electric potential of the proposed reserves. In doing so, government clearly favoured local opinion and refused to take any early action of the reserve proposals of the Scientific Coordinating Committee, or the proposals of the National Parks Authority for the incorporation of Waikukupa and southern Okarito State Forests into Westland National Park;

- on 30 November 1978 the four West Coast Counties formed a United Council and, with remarkable haste, on 11 December decided to prepare a regional scheme; newspaper advertisements appeared on 18 December 1978 seeking public submissions on a regional land use policy by 2 March 1979: Anyone concerned at the national interest in the sphere of conservation of indigenous forests could be expected to be alarmed at the obvious implications of these events - the possible eventual binding of the Crown (under the Town & Country Planning Act) by local opinion (much of which is well known to be anti-preservationist) in the management of a national resource, viz. the Crown forests of the West Coast.

If the national interest is going to be served in the future management of West Coast forests it is essential that our conservation legislation, such as the Forests Act, National Parks Act, Reserves Act, Wildlife Act, etc. is not overridden or obstructed by the Town & Country Act. Likewise, the West Coast Regional Planning Committee can reasonably expect to be assisted in its important function by a clear expression of government's requirements in the national interest; furthermore, the region deserves a much clearer expression of government's willingness to provide development incentives or compensate for loss of production through national policies aimed at preservation of natural areas in the West Coast.

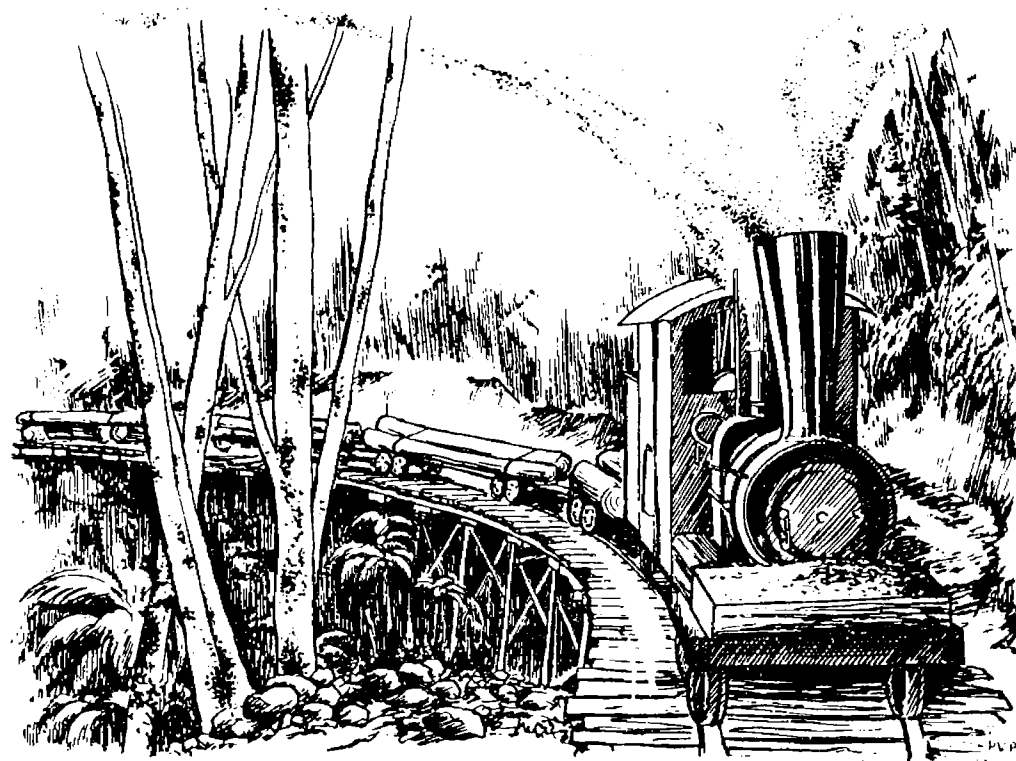
6.5. CONCLUSIONS ON FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF FOREST RECREATION IN NORTH WESTLAND

Only a sketchy outline of the recreational and historic resources of North Westland was made public by NZFS at the July 1977 Hokitika Seminar. In contrast, the scientific values of the forests in the region have received considerable attention from the Scientific Co-ordinating Committee for Beech Research and their views have formed the basis of the ecological reserve proposals. It is regrettable that NZFS has not yet published an equivalent inventory of the important recreational and historic areas, even though this information has been in existence for some years and must be an important part of the sieve-planning procedure which will ultimately delineate production forests.

The following chapters, 7 - 10, therefore, attempt to describe the recreational importance of the beech forest project areas in the hope that these values will be conserved and further recreational opportunities provided as the rate of beech forest utilisation increases in the coming years.

REFERENCES

1. KIRKLAND, A. 1973: Beech Forests. N.Z. Forest Service, 48 pp.
2. FEDERATED MOUNTAIN CLUBS OF N.Z. 1977: Submissions to the Minister of Forests on "The Future of West Coast Forest Industries", Sept. 1977. 12 pp.
3. FMC. October 1972: Detailed submissions to N.Z. Forest Service on beech utilisation proposals. 6 p. Accompanying letter to NZFS of 10/10/1972.
4. FMC. June 1973: Representative use of some West Coast beech project resource units, Appendix III to major report, 3 p. Accompanying letter to NZFS of 9/7/1973.
5. N.Z. FOREST SERVICE, 1978: West Coast Forest Policy. 10 pp.



OLD LOGGING LOCO - in action

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Many of the books, reports and articles recommended at the end of Chapter 1 are also relevant to North Westland. The following literature is mainly related to the indigenous forestry controversy in the northern part of the West Coast.

WILDLIFE/RESERVES:

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