

HOKITIKA - TARAMAKAU - GREY

"Stillwater, a road and rail junction, and site of the West Coast's largest timber mill, was originally called Arnold but gained its later name because its creek backed up as a sheet of water when the Grey River flooded. ... When the Hon. Edward Richardson, Minister of Public Works, arrived to turn the first sod for the railway, the town was renamed Richardson in his honour. However, the Minister somehow upset the local folk, and with suitable liquid support they held another ceremony later that day and re-named the town Stillwater".

"Gold Trails of the West Coast"
Tony Nolan, p.53.

7.1. LANDFORMS AND VEGETATION

North of the Hokitika catchment, the Alpine Fault and the coastline tend to diverge leaving a wide piedmont surface cut by west-trending rivers - Arahura, Taramakau, Arnold, Nelson, Ahaura and Grey. The last four listed drain to the Mawheraiti - Grey depression and in toto form the eastern portion of the large Grey River catchment. Between this vast landscape of forested moraines and terraces and the schists and greywacke mountains east of the Alpine Fault, there are a series of discrete granite intrusions strung in a SW - NE direction. These granite "islands" in a "sea" of fluvio-glacial outwash form, from south to north, such landmarks as Tuhua, Island Hill, Turiwhate, Hohonu Range, Te Kinga, Granite Hill and the Elliot Range. To the west of the Alpine Fault and these granite hills, a string of attractive forested lakes nestle in the piedmont - Lakes Kaniere, Brunner, Haupiri, Ahaura and Hochstetter.

Generally the topography is more subdued than South Westland, with the formerly dense beech and podocarp/hardwood forests of the Grey catchment stretching for 40 km between the Alexander/Elliot Range in the east and the Paparoa Range in the west.

The Arnold River, draining Lake Brunner, roughly follows a marked forest transition - from the predominantly podocarp/hardwood forests in the south to the mixed beech/podocarp forest of the north. The beech element is generally considered to be a relic of the Pleistocene Glaciations, with the different beech species now adjusting into a number of subtle forest associations depending upon topography, climate and soil factors. At higher altitudes, and in the limited remaining valley bottom and lowland forests in the piedmont, red and silver beech are dominant. The sub-alpine forest is generally silver beech in the north but contains mountain cedar, Hall's totara, mountain toatoa, pink pine and rata and other species in the Arahura and Taramakau in the south. In the middle to lower altitudes, especially on warmer aspects in the Grey valley, hard beech becomes prevalent, especially in association with rata, kamahi and quintinia.

7.2. EXPLORATION HISTORY

North Westland was the scene for some of the most adventurous exploration in early European settlement of New Zealand. In the late 1840's, four remarkable men - Brunner, Heaphy, Fox, and their Maori guide, Kehu - explored parts of the Buller and Grey river catchments and the coastline of North Westland under very difficult conditions. Later in the 1850's and 60's, with the establishment of the Canterbury Settlements, the Dobson family (father Edward and sons Arthur and George) were

prominent in the exploration of the headwaters of the Hurunui and Waimakariri in the quest for the ideal trans-alpine pass to Westland. In 1857 Leonard Harper and companions made the first European crossing of "Hurunui Saddle" (between the Hurunui and the Taramakau, now named Harpers Pass) which became the main supply route in the early phase of the West Coast gold rushes. The Nelson surveyor, John Rochfort, cut a track over the Pass in 1859 and, two years later discovered Amuri Pass. The Dobson family pushed for Arthurs Pass (named by George after his brother) between the Bealey and the Otira, first crossed by Edward and Arthur Dobson in 1864, while others advocated Brownings Pass. In fact, a flock of sheep were driven over Brownings Pass as early as 1865, only a few months after the first crossing by Browning and Griffiths.

With Hunt's discovery of gold at Lake Brunner late in 1864, and the payable find at Greenstone Creek (between Lake Brunner and Kumara) the following year, the West Coast gold rush was really on. In the next four years most of the Hokitika - Taramakau - Grey valley was combed by thousands of diggers; the crumbling relics of that phenomenal rush constitute one of the major outdoor recreational attractions of the region.

7.3. RECREATIONAL ATTRACTIONS

The outdoor recreational attractions of this region lie within two quite distinct landscapes:

- (a) the mountain region of the Arahura - Taramakau - Haupiri - Trent - Waiheke - Robinson - Upper Grey valleys.
- (b) the historical areas, forests and rivers of the piedmont country in the Ahaura - middle Grey.

The outstanding feature in the mountain region is the western part of Arthurs Pass National Park, encompassing the Otira and upper Taramakau valleys. The Main Divide north from Harpers Pass to Lewis Pass is generally below 1700m with several good crossing points, such as Hope Pass

and Amuri Pass. With the predominance once again of beech in the montane valleys draining to the west, easier travel attracts more hunting and tramping parties - particularly because of the proximity of the main highway to Christchurch. The recent opening of the Inchbonnie bridge over the Taramakau has greatly improved access to the western slopes of the Divide for Canterbury parties.

Most of the floodplains and low terraces in the piedmont country have now been cleared of forest; the intermediate and higher terraces have generally been logged for podocarps and are likely to be logged for some beech as well in future. The whole area has felt 110 years of sporadic settlement with remnants of the goldmining boom of the 1860 - 70's everywhere. Consequently, the recreational attractions are not those offered by majestic virgin forests and lakes; they are more cultural - the fascinating history of the old diggings and pack tracks linking them together. Even the more recent exploitation of indigenous timber is not without recreational interest - old mills, tramways and a mosaic of forest in various stages of regeneration.

Because of the extent of roading throughout the region there is reasonable access to two outstanding canoeing rivers - the Upper Grey and the Ahaura - which flow through very scenic forests in their upper-mid reaches. Furthermore, the lakes, especially Kaniere and Brunner, are also popular for picnicking, fishing and duck-shooting. Brown trout are in all the rivers in the region and rainbow trout in the Arahura and Taramakau.

7.4. ZONING

There is no map illustrating the zonings of this region; they fall into two simple, broad categories - Natural Area and Multiple Use - east and west of the Alpine Fault respectively.

7.4.1. WILDERNESS

There is no area sufficiently large, unmodified and remote to warrant Wilderness Area status. The Otehake catchment (a major upper tributary of the Taramakau) in the western part of Arthurs Pass National Park has been zoned wilderness by the Park Board but the area is small and has a track system (plus a hut) through the main valley.

7.4.2. NATURAL AREAS

The Elliot Range and the mountain ranges and valleys west of the Alpine Fault are zoned natural area. The fault trends SW -NE along a line from Lake Kaniere - Inchbonnie - Haupiri - Nancy/Tass Rivers - Upper Grey River. Most of this natural area is already tracked and hutted, many of the tracks (e.g. Arahura/Brownings Pass, Harper Pass, Amuri Pass) following old routes used by Maori raiding parties and later European goldminers.

(1) Arahura Valley

The "Three Pass Trip" (Harman, Whitehorn and Browning) is one of the most popular mountaineering/tramping routes crossing the divide between Canterbury and Westland. The Styx valley is well hutted and the old pack track across Styx Saddle into the Arahura and up to Browning Pass is generally well-maintained by the Forest Service. Overall, the mountaineering difficulties are relatively minor for a summer Three Pass Trip and its management should be closely co-ordinated with that of the upper Waimakariri catchment in Arthurs Pass National Park and the Craigieburn State Forest Park. The latter has now been extended into the Harper and Avoca catchments which are closer to the Wilberforce, the most direct route to Brownings Pass.

(2) Taramakau Valley

The route over Harper Pass from the Taramakau to the

Hurunui (in Lake Sumner State Forest Park) is the other popular trans-divide crossing in the region. It is considerably lower than the "Three Passes", barely sub-alpine, and in good weather conditions makes an easy week-long tramping trip. The old Internal Affairs deer-killer huts are due for replacement and with some more bridging and hutting it would provide the obvious choice for a summer trans-divide route, although not up to New Zealand Walkway standard. The desirability of a trans-divide Walkway is still a matter of some debate and is certainly not of high priority at this time. However, of all the passes in the main divide between the Hokitika and the Lewis (excluding those already roaded), Harper Pass is the lowest, although the rivers on the western side of Amuri Pass are safer.

Another attraction for the tired traveller through these mountain valleys is the chain of hot springs scattered through the Taipo, Otehake, Hurunui and Haupiri - and probably many of their tributaries. The Taipo is popular with trampers and has often been suggested for addition to Arthurs Pass National Park.

(3) Elliot Range and Main Divide between Harpers Pass and Lake Christobel

The headwaters of the Haupiri, Ahaura (Trent, Tutaekuri, Waiheke and Nancy) and Grey (Clarke, Upper Grey and Robinson) are all pleasant beech montane valleys, generally with easy travel in the riverbed and good access to the snowgrass tops. The Clarke, in particular, is a little different, rising among the cirques and hanging valleys in the hard granite country around Mts Elliot, Rameses and Harata. This bold escarpment is the dominant backdrop to the forests of the Middle Grey and Ahaura valleys when viewed from the main highway between Ikamatua and Ngahere.

Amuri Pass, at the head of the Waiheke tributary of the Ahaura, is of historical interest as the route for the old Canterbury - Ahaura cattle track. Remains of the benched

track can still be found in the headwaters but below Haupiri it probably followed the river flats of the Ahaura (see following section 7.4.3 for mid-Ahaura River description).

There is potential for a good round trip from the Waiheke to Lake Christobel (via the head of the Robinson) and back to Haupiri, via the gentle, forested Tass and Nancy valleys. Alternatively in good conditions, experienced mountaineering parties can follow north from Amuri Pass to the region of the Grand Duchess above Lake Christobel.

To some extent this northernmost portion of the natural area is an extension of the State Forest Park proposed for the Reefton/Victoria Range/Maruia area; (Maruia State Forest Park, map 6); it would be logical on recreational grounds to give this part of the natural area forest park status, contiguous with the Lake Sumner State Forest Park on the Canterbury side of the main divide.

7.4.3. MULTIPLE USE AREA

As already discussed in Chapter 6, the forested piedmont west of the Alpine Fault was the core of the original beech forest utilisation scheme and now, with the adoption of the 1978 West Coast Forest Policy, earmarked for selective logging of both beech and podocarp. Fortunately, the extent of indigenous forest should not now decrease through the conversion of hill country podocarp/hardwood forest to pine plantation - as has occurred in so many parts of Waimea, Omoto, Mawhera and Hochstetter State Forests. Nevertheless, the more intensive utilisation of the forests will both diminish recreational values as well and create many opportunities for new recreational experiences, often associated with a managed indigenous production forest.

The 'multiple-use' zoning for the piedmont country of the Grey valley (and its tributaries) expresses this desire of enhancing the recreational resource through careful management by the N.Z. Forest Service to achieve a range of objectives - wood supply, scientific, aesthetic, historic and recreational. The detailed prescriptions of this multiple-

use will have to be outlined in management plans; the complexity of the issues and conflicts is too involved to go into in this publication. Furthermore, the inventory of the historical resource is nowhere near complete - the region saw the most intensive alluvial goldmining, coal-mining and timber-milling enterprises in all the West Coast but so little has been thoroughly documented and even less publicised or interpreted for the public. For every 100 visitors who visit the replica that is Shantytown there are probably less than 10 who fossick among the real ghost towns, overgrown and largely forgotten, scattered throughout the piedmont country.



CHILDRENS' GRAVES

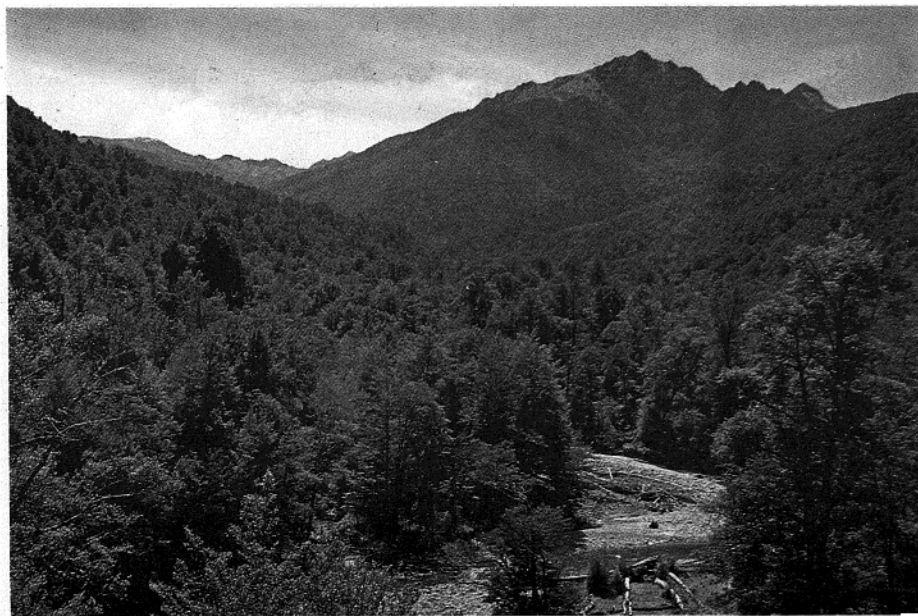
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Felled and burned podocarp/hardwood forest, Mawhera S.F., Grey Valley; looking NE towards Elliot Range.
Les Molloy



Old dammed outlet of Lake Hochstetter, Elliot Range in background.
Les Molloy



Beech forest in Alexander River valley.

Les Molloy



Regenerating red beech forest, Amuri Pass - Ahaura Track, Ahaura Valley.

Les Molloy

Consequently, it is only possible to touch on a few highlights in the following paragraphs:

Hokitika - Kumara - Lake Brunner (goldmining ghost towns)

Within a 15km radius of Kumara lie many of the alluvial goldfields that sustained the romantic heyday of the West Coast in the 1860's - Greenstone, Dillmanstown, Goldsborough, New River, Waimea, Stafford. The forest is generally only second growth but mining relics are everywhere - tunnels, water-races and piles of dredge tailings.

There is also the old mining track from Goldsborough to Callaghans - a popular local walk.

There would seem to be an outstanding potential for some sort of regional historical park based on Hokitika if the West Coast United Council could find the manpower and finance to increase public interest in this heritage. In addition, tranquil Lake Kaniere, and its scenic reserve, stands in pristine contrast to the devastation of the landscape in the region. In view of the diminishing returns from indigenous forestry the region must also look to its historical heritage as a supplement to the local economy.

Scientific interest (ecological reserves)

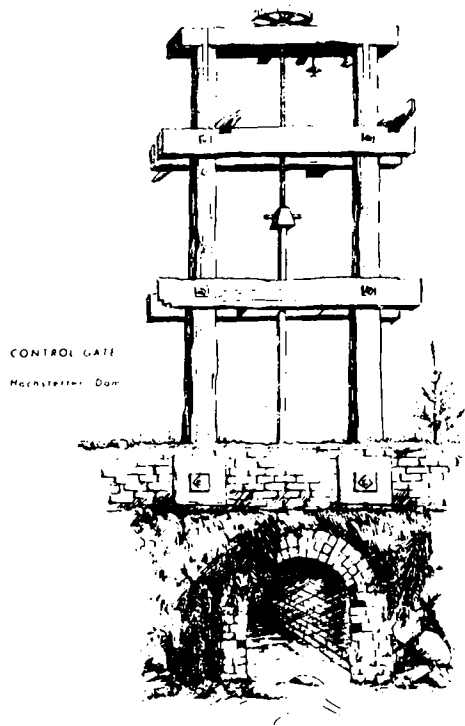
The botanical interest of the beech/podocarp boundary around the Arnold River has already been commented on in Section 7.1. The West Coast Forest Policy has recognised the importance of reserving representative landscape/soil/forest systems - ecological reserves - throughout the production forest. These are listed in the appendix to Chapter 6 and several important reserves - all with recreational values - lie within the remaining virgin piedmont forests. These include:

- Flagstaff (beech/podocarp forest on moraine; high value for birdlife; Ahaura River);
- Lake Hochstetter (dense terrace podocarp, on shoreline and downstream of Lake Hochstetter);
- Deep Creek (localised, southern distribution of beech; Mawhera S.F.);

- Glasgow Creek (only remnant of dense rimu forest between Nelson Creek and Arnold River; Red Jacks Creek);
- Card Creek (high birdlife; kahikatea, matai and nikau; Kaiata Range);
- Greenstone (wide range of unexploited forest types in heavily exploited area; Greenstone River);
- Three Mile Hill (representative of soils of region; Taramakau Valley);
- Shamrock (only remnant of unlogged hill country podocarp/ hardwood forest; Goldsborough).

Of these ecological reserves the largest, and the one probably containing the most merchantable podocarp forest, is Lake Hochstetter. It needs emphasising that the Scientific Co-ordinating Committee have often stressed that these are the minimum necessary to preserve a representative sample of the original forests in the region. While it may seem attractive to the Forest Service and the local industry to sacrifice them to alleviate the sawlog shortfall, their long-term value to the entire nation requires their reservation.

Lake Hochstetter is not without recreational value. It is a natural area in sharp contrast to the rather ugly young exotic forest emerging on its south and east sides. Boats can be launched from a picnic area on the eastern side of the lake and there is another ideal picnic area at the old dammed outlet. The lake level was raised in 1876 to provide water, via a race of open channels and tunnels, for the miners down valley around Nelson Creek. In the grassy clearing a clay pit, brick kiln and bricks can be found - all used to line the tunnels of the water race which can be reached on the far side of the dam. There is also another old race and tunnel system at the NW end of the Lake - this race leading to the Ahaura River.



Control gate, Hochstetter Dam.

- Kakawau (West face of Peter Ridge near Greymouth);
- Mitchells (near west shore of Lake Brunner);
- Dillmanstown (escarpment forest between S.H.73 and Taramakau River);
- Kokatahi (south-west escarpment in Kaniere State forest above Kokatahi River).

There are many other small areas which provide important forest backdrops and NZFS are urged to take account of the aesthetic importance of such areas, especially those which can be seen from the roads.

Unfortunately, Lake Ahaura was not designated amenity reserve soon enough to avoid the clear-felling of much of its forested catchment on the steep south-west side - all to within several metres of the shoreline. Scars such as this will remain as unwanted monuments to man's insensitivity.

Ahaura River

One of the most important natural recreational features of the region is the Ahaura River. As already discussed in section 7.4.2. the old Canterbury - Ahaura cattle track crossed Amuri Pass and followed the Waiheke River past the Tutaekuri junction to the point on the Alpine Fault where the river joins the Nancy and Haupiri Rivers. The track followed river flats to Hamer's Flat where the Ahaura has cut itself about 100m down into the outwash gravels as a twisting gorge. The Ahaura gorge is of major importance for canoeing, not only for the water movement but also the natural beauty of the forested surroundings as the river winds between the walls of the gorge.

The cattle track can be found in places between Hamer Flat and Jims Flat and is in good condition from there to Big Gully. From Big Gully to Ahaura it has been roaded over. If some sections of the track are cleared by NZFS they will give excellent walking access to parts of the Ahaura Gorge; in addition, some sections of the track

Amenity Reserves

A number of forest fringes and lakes in the piedmont have been designated amenity reserves in the West Coast Forest Policy. These include:

- Ahaura River (Ahaura River gorge below Hamer Flat);
- Lake Ahaura (Lake Ahaura and most of its small catchment);
- Lady Lake (Kahikatea-fringed lake beside Nelson Creek - Inchbonnie Road);

pass through plots of regenerating red beech forest thereby providing an opportunity for the public to see beech management and various stages of forest regeneration.

Grey River (Robinson junction to Waipuna)

The middle reaches of the Grey River, particularly the Gentle Annie Gorge, are as highly rated as the Ahaura by canoeists. The "wilderness" and scenic qualities are just as high and the water movement even more exciting. Both the Ahaura and Grey have the advantage of road access to their upper reaches for canoeists. There is a good benched track down the true right of the Grey from the beginning of Gentle Annie Gorge to the Clarke junction. This track is of historical interest since it is the remains of the original Nelson - West Coast track, first used by George Fairweather Moonlight in 1863, and predates the Buller tracks. This section is not only suitable for Walkway class tramping but is popular for fishing and hunting. Indigenous logging has already penetrated to the high terraces near the junction of the Alexander River with the Grey and it is important that this logging and roading do not impinge any further down into the Gentle Annie Gorge (i.e. below the 1000' contour). It is regrettable that the NZFS would not accept the middle Grey, Clarke valley and Alexander River/Absolum Creek as amenity reserves as requested by FMC and a number of other organisations (both private and government). This is one of the major zoning over-sights in the West Coast Forest Policy and recreational interests will need to seek further discussions on the future protection of this important area.

The Alexander River/Absolum Creek is traversed by an old benched track through to the Inangahua River and S.H.7. With some re-cutting of the track it would make an excellent day trip. Another feature of the region is Browns Creek sawmill, a small, old-style mill, set in a clearing among beech forest on the high terrace on the north side of the Grey valley. With the future of small mills somewhat doubtful because of the decreasing timber supply, efforts should be made to retain sawmills like this because of their educational and historic value.

7.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the importance of the "Three Pass Trip" for tramping parties be recognised -

and the Westland portion maintained and managed in collaboration with the Arthurs Pass National Park and Craigieburn State Forest Park in Canterbury.

2. That the potential of the Taramakau - Harpers Pass - Hurunui route as a summer section of the New Zealand Walkway be investigated.

3. That the Ellist Range and western portion of the Main Divide between Harpers Pass and Lake Christobel be incorporated within the proposed Maruia State Forest Park.

4. That the recreational and historic values in the Grey Valley piedmont country be recognised -

and proposals for their protection and enhancement be submitted for public discussion through detailed Forest Management Plans.

5. That the West Coast United Council investigate the potential for a "regional historic park" -

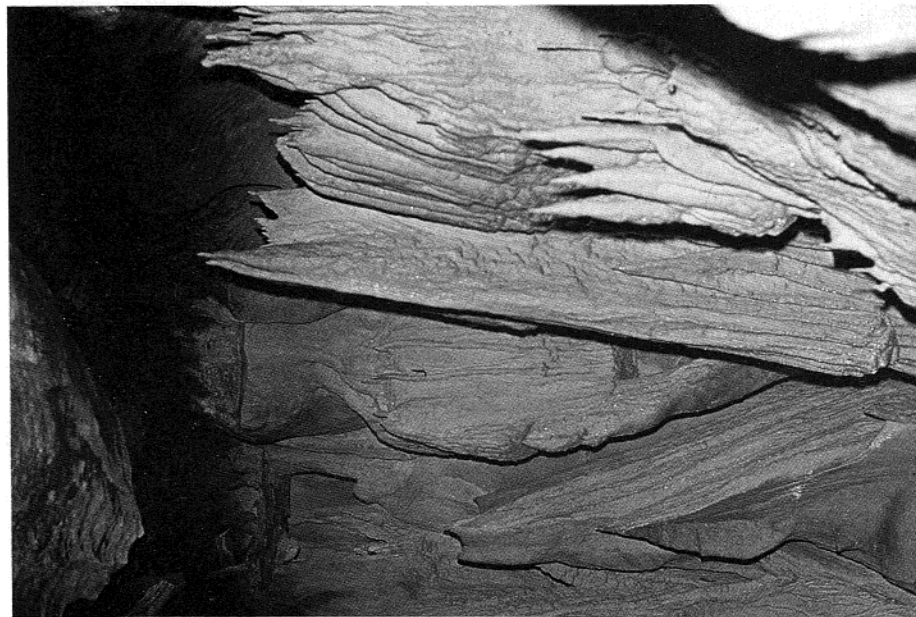
based on the forests and goldfields of the Kaniere - Kumara region.

6. That the proposed NZFS ecological and amenity reserves (1978 West Coast Forest Policy) in the region be confirmed in their moratorium from logging.

7. That NZFS recognise the recreational importance of the middle reaches of the Grey Valley (Gentle Annie Gorge), Clarke Valley and Alexander River/Absolum Creek and exclude future logging from these natural areas.

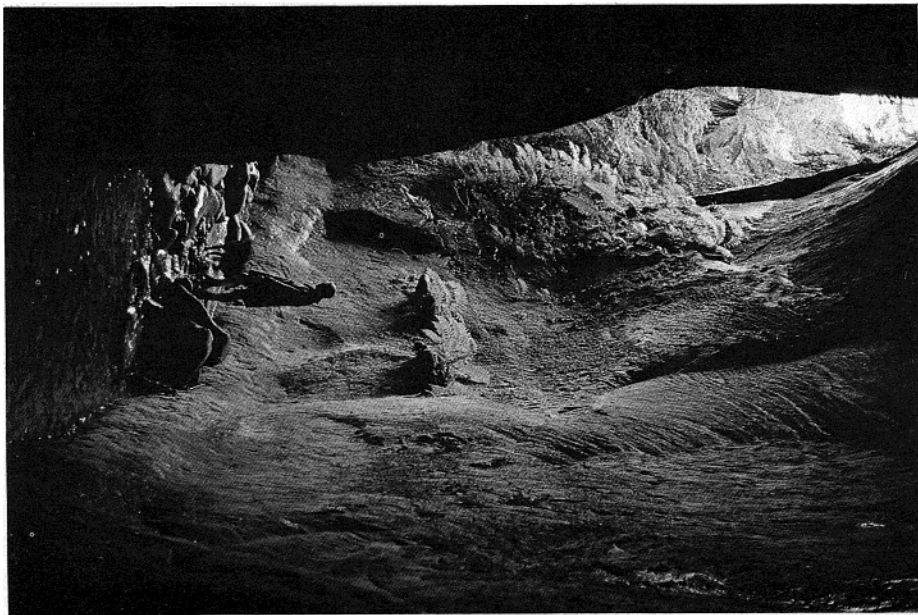
RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Pascoe, John, 1956: The Southern Alps : from the Kaikouras to the Rangitata (Pegasus, Ch.ch), 72 pp.



Whitecliffs Caves, Inangahua.

Les Molloy



Old Miners tunnel near Goldsbrough Track, Stafford Creek.

N.Z. Forest Service



Margaret Battery, Croesus Track.

N. Z. Forest Service