

MARUIA - MATAKITAKI - INANGAHUA

"As one moves north along the Southern Alps, the Lewis Pass area is the point at which the mountain chain changes from being a single-ridged backbone to become a spreading mountain massif. Within this area it is possible to feel a sense of enclosure, of being within a mountain landscape, rather than of appearing to be on the edge of a mountain chain as in, say, Westland National Park."

"The Lewis Pass Region", 1977, p.78
(Lands and Survey Department, 1977)

8.1. LANDFORMS AND VEGETATION

As the Alpine Fault swings to the NE further away from the Tasman Sea, the landforms and geology become more complex. It is simplest to consider the region in terms of four distinct landforms.

(a) East of Alpine Fault:

The Alpine Fault continues through Mary-Maruia saddle at the head of the Grey valley, north-east past Lake Daniells through the Glenroy and across the mid-Matakitaki to the head of Lake Rotoroa in Nelson Lakes National Park. Immediately east of the fault is the Spenser Mountain chain, with the rocks progressively grading eastwards from schist, through semi-schist to greywacke and argillite.

(b) Middle Maruia Valley:

This area, particularly between the Glenroy and Maruia, is a rugged landscape with very complex geology - greywacke, marble, and an igneous complex (diorites and pegmatites), sandstone and conglomerates. The Rappahannock Valley is dominated by the striking western face of the Granite Pinnacles - not granite but a conglomerate consisting of quartz and schist pebbles.

(c) Victoria and Brunner Ranges:

These granite mountains form a central massif of hard rock in the area. They are the northern extension of the granite domes strung along the Alpine Fault to the south. Both ranges are characterised by U-shaped valleys, cirques and sharp, pyramid-like mountains of which Mt. Haast, easily seen from Rahu Saddle on S.H.7, is typical.

(d) Reefton greywacke Hills:

For 40 km between Larrys Creek in the north and Snowy River in the south, a 12 km wide band of greywacke and argillite (Waiuta group) is less mountainous, but still very rugged. Veins of gold-bearing quartz in this greywacke country gave rise to the reef-mining rush of the 1870's that made Reefton into one of the wealthiest towns on the West Coast.

The vegetation pattern is much simpler than the geology. It is within this part of North Westland that the beech forests achieve predominance. The Maruia valley is outstanding for its beautiful valley floor red beech forests (up to 350m). At higher altitudes silver beech becomes

dominant and generally forms the bushline although stunted mountain beech forms the treeline (around 1300m) in drier areas. A similar pattern is to be found in the upper Inangahua and Matakītaki valleys.

At lower altitudes in the Inangahua valley beech/podocarp forest predominates on the terraces and hard beech on the hill country - with the usual mixture of hardwoods such as kamahi and quintinia.

8.2. EXPLORATION HISTORY

The head of the Maruia (Cannibal Gorge) has always had a romantic, if somewhat grisly, association with Maori travel between the Amuri area in North Canterbury and the West Coast. Later, James Mackay (who subsequently bought Westland for the Crown for £300), Travers, Maling, Lewis and Rochfort all contributed to the exploration of the Maruia and the eventual establishment of Lewis Pass as the most important road link between Canterbury and Westland.

The first alluvial gold in the region was found in Boatmans Creek in the lower Inangahua in 1866. The first reef gold was not found until 1870 in Murrays Creek behind present day Blacks Point. During the next 30 years the quartz-bearing hills to the north and south of Reefton were combed by prospectors and the quartz-crushing gold industry of the Reefton area entered its heyday - 300,000 ounces of gold having been won by 1886.

However, the most important route-finder to improve on the work of Heaphy and Brunner was the near-legendary George Fairweather Moonlight who played a major prospecting/exploratory role in the West Coast gold rushes. Moonlight's name is primarily associated with the Glenroy - Matakītaki - Upper Buller region where he traded for many years. In September 1863 he linked together the inland passes route from Marlborough to the West Coast thereby avoiding the Buller crossings and gorges. He followed the Brunner/Heaphy/Fox route to Lake Rotoroa and crossed the low saddle to the

junction of the Tutaki and Tiraumea. The Tutaki - Mole Saddle led to the wide upper Matakītaki valley, down river past the Glenroy to the Maruia Saddle and Frog Flat in the Maruia. Travelling up the Maruia he eventually reached the Grey Valley and the coast via the low Mary-Maruia saddle near present day Springs Junction.

8.3. RECREATIONAL ATTRACTIONS

As with the Grey region, there are two broad categories of outdoor recreational attractions:

- (a) the mountains and valleys of the montane zone;
- (b) the historical interest of the old settlements around Reefton.

The montane zone of the upper Inangahua and Maruia is familiar to travellers on S.H.7 which is one of the most scenic roads in the South Island. Between Reefton and Lewis Pass the road climbs through beech forest with the farmland around Springs Junction providing an extremely pleasant rural complement to the beech-covered hills and mountains. In fact, the mixture of valley-farmland and mountain-slope forest in the Maruia, Glenroy and Matakītaki gives the whole region park-like character, perhaps one of the most pleasing cultural landscapes in New Zealand.

The valleys and peaks are consequently very accessible; travel in the beech forest is good, there is no sub-alpine scrub to speak of and the alpine tops generally give good, open travelling. The Victoria Range, because of the glacial imprint upon the hard granite, provides numerous rock-climbing challenges during alpine travel.

The historical resource is predominantly within the quartz reef zone east of Reefton, from Boatmans Creek in the Inangahua to Waiuta in the south. In addition to this vast resource of gold-mining relics, there are abandoned coal mines and sawmills plus many kilometres of tracks linking them.

8.4. ZONING

8.4.1. WILDERNESS

Although the Victoria Range and Brunner Range are relatively undeveloped, they are not sufficiently large or remote to constitute a real wilderness. In view of their likely designation as part of a State forest park (West Coast Forest Policy 1978) it is more appropriate for limited recreational development to be on the periphery while the core of the Brunner Range and the southern Victoria Range be retained as a "remote experience" area in terms of the new State forest zoning policy.

8.4.2. NATURAL AREA

Most of the montane beech forest has been zoned natural area and there follow below several prescriptions for its management, partly as national park but predominantly as a State forest park.

(1) Spenser National Park (map 6)

The Lewis Pass region, the Matakītaki, Glenroy and Clear Grey valleys were the subject of a detailed study by Lands and Survey Department in 1977. Their well researched study report ("The Lewis Pass Region") to the NPA concluded that all these western valleys were of national park quality. Earlier, in 1967, the Nelson Lakes National Park Board proposed to the NPA that the park be extended to Lewis Pass in the south, taking in both the eastern and western flanks of the Spenser Range. Since 1967, FMC have tried at various times to keep the "extended Nelson Lakes National Park" proposal alive and co-operated fully with the Lewis Pass study team.

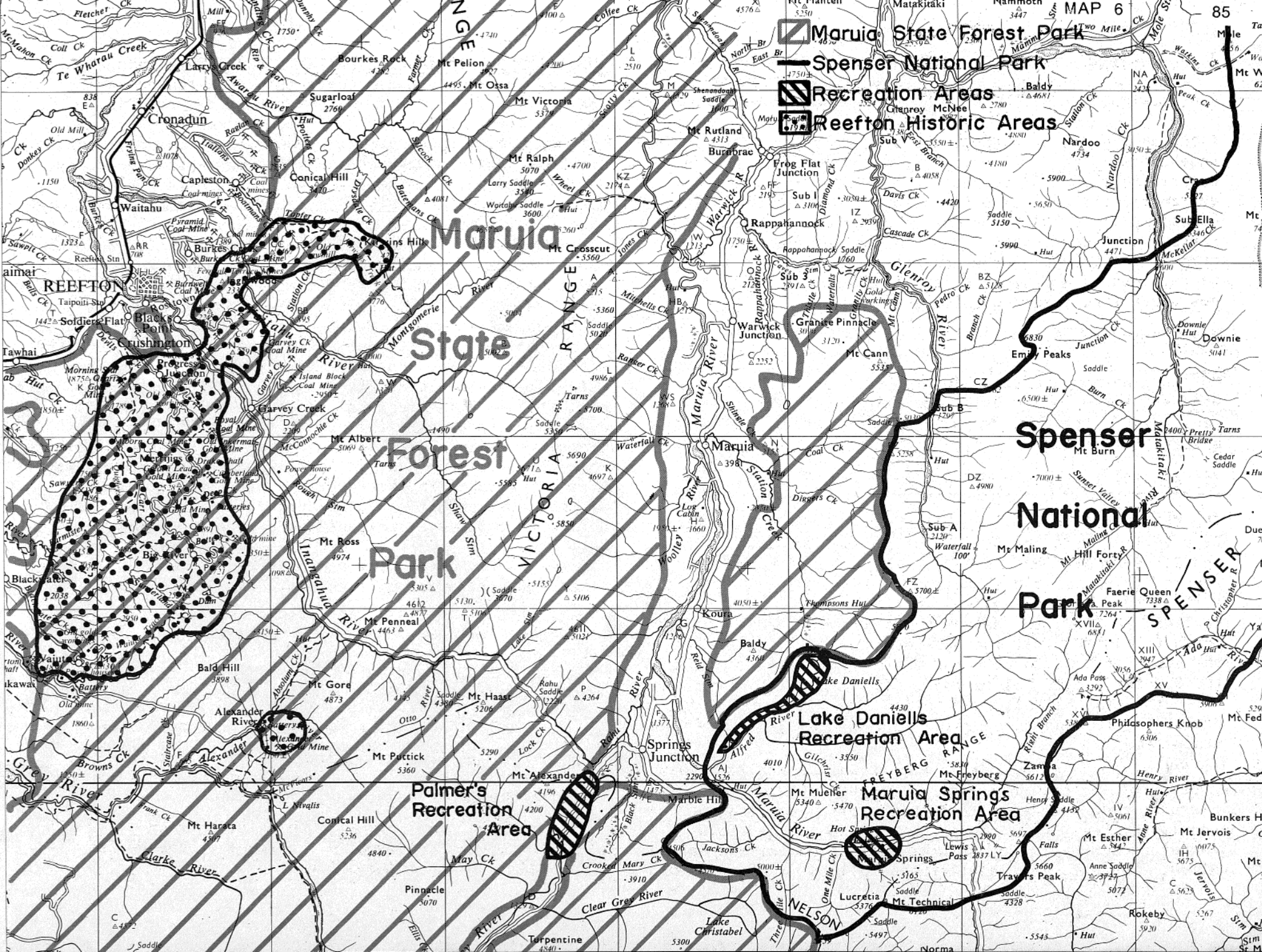
The FMC response to the Lewis Report was generally highly favourable; the only difference was basically one of interpretation - concern that the report's proposal of an even larger Lewis Pass scenic reserve could lead to a gradual reduction in the natural attractions of the Maruia valley. The FMC view was that the valleys of the Glenroy,

Matakītaki, Alfred/Lake Daniells and Maruia (above the Alfred junction) should constitute an extended national park.

Undoubtedly, such a proposal would significantly change the character of Nelson Lakes National Park - hence the coining of the name "Spenser National Park", which denotes the main topographic feature, viz. the Spenser Range, linking Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoroa in the north and Lewis Pass in the south. The study report's arguments for a large scenic reserve spanning both the Maruia and Lewis catchments are too subtle in the face of the overwhelming national park qualities of the Maruia and the Lewis. The only aspect in which the proposed park boundary in map 6 differs from the FMC submission of April 1978 to the NPA is concerning the environs of Lewis Pass. Lewis Pass is a remarkable place and the scenic unity should be mirrored in an administrative unity under the one park board. Hence, the proposed southern boundary to Spenser National Park lies about 2 km down the Lewis valley, roughly between Mt. Technical and Travers Peak. As such, the Pass, with its red tussock and beech-fringed tarn mirroring the Spenser peaks at the head of Cannibal Gorge, remains an integral and most important feature of the park.

The arguments for including the area shown in map 6 within a national park are overwhelming. They include:

- the outstanding scenic view of Mt. Gloriana and Cannibal Gorge from above Lewis Pass;
- the recreational attractions of the Matakītaki and Glenroy (withdrawn from beech project by NZFS in 1973 after objections by FMC), valleys which provide important western access to the Spenser Range;
- the magnificent red beech of the Maruia valley, overhanging S.H.7 for 10 km from the Maruia Springs to Marble Hill;
- the scenic gem of Lake Daniells, surrounded by beech forest and nestling in a glacial trough between Alfred River and Station Creek;



Maruia State Forest Park

Spenser National Park

Recreation Areas

Reefton Historic Areas

Maruia

State

Forest

Park

Spenser

National

Park

Palmer's
Recreation
Area

Lake Daniells
Recreation Area

Maruia Springs
Recreation Area

SPENSER

NELSON

- the scientific interest of the Lewis Pass area as the region where three distinct regional floras (Nelson/Marlborough, Canterbury, and Westland) meet - all on a uniform greywacke geological base;
- the historical association of Lewis Pass, Cannibal Gorge and the Maruia Springs.

(2) Maruia State Forest Park (map 6)

The bulk of the region west of the proposed "Spenser National Park" consists of State forest - mountains, hills and valleys with considerable historical interest and recreational opportunity. The most appropriate status of this part of the natural area zone would be a State forest park - as proposed in the West Coast Forest Policy. A Maruia State Forest Park is shown in part in map 6; it would cover the remaining State forests of the Maruia valley, the Victoria and Brunner Ranges between the Maruia and Inangahua Rivers, the "May Tops" and the upper Grey (including Lake Christobel) above the Clarke junction, and the greywacke country between Reefton and Waitaha. In addition, it should be extended to include the Elliot Range and the watershed of the Robinson and tributaries of the Ahaura east of the Alpine Fault (see 7.4.2.)

Although the Clear Grey River and Lake Christobel are included in the forest park at this stage their scenic, recreational and scientific importance is such that their exact status requires further examination. The Lewis Pass Study report so recommends and it is noted that the Scientific Co-ordinating Committee for Beech Research recommended the establishment of the large Lake Christobel Ecological Reserve (Appendix, Chapter 6) which covers the entire catchment of the Clear Grey, traverses the forested valley floor around Crooked Mary Creek and the Upper Grey River and also includes the lower part of the Brown Grey Valley. If this ecological reserve proposal is accepted by the Officials Committee and government, then there is not so much urgency about other formal protection of this beautiful north-eastern most corner of Westland Conservancy.

(3) Victoria and Brunner Ranges

The central topographic feature of the proposed forest park is the granite massif of the Brunner and Victoria Ranges, extending 60 km from the Upper Buller Gorge to the Rahu Saddle at the head of the Inangahua River. The main catchments are the Deepdale, Awarau (Larrys Creek) and Waitahu; all are still in a natural state with only very limited hutting and tracking.

There are two large ecological reserves proposed in these ranges - "Coal Creek" in the Inangahua, and "Central Maruia" between the Victoria Range and Mt. Rutland below the junction of the Warwick River with the Maruia. The rest of the western flanks of the Victoria Range (Maruia) are scheduled for beech forest management, as is the Deepdale and lower Waitahu. In theory, this type of indigenous forest management conforms with the multiple-use management philosophies for forest parks; whether, in practise, it will be acceptable to the public will depend upon the management skills of the N.Z. Forest Service. On recreational grounds, the milling of the beech/podocarp forests of the Inangahua is vastly preferable to the milling of any of the pure beech forests of the mid-Maruia or Deepdale. N.Z. Forest Service are urged to use these latter forests only as a last resort, particularly as there is no recognised economic outlet for the chip residues which would be a natural by-product of the felling techniques most likely to achieve maximum regeneration.

The core of the Brunner Range (the Deepdale and upper Awarau valleys) is quite remote and its wilderness qualities should be recognised by NZFS by a "remote experience" zoning. The logical route through the Victoria Range from west to east is:

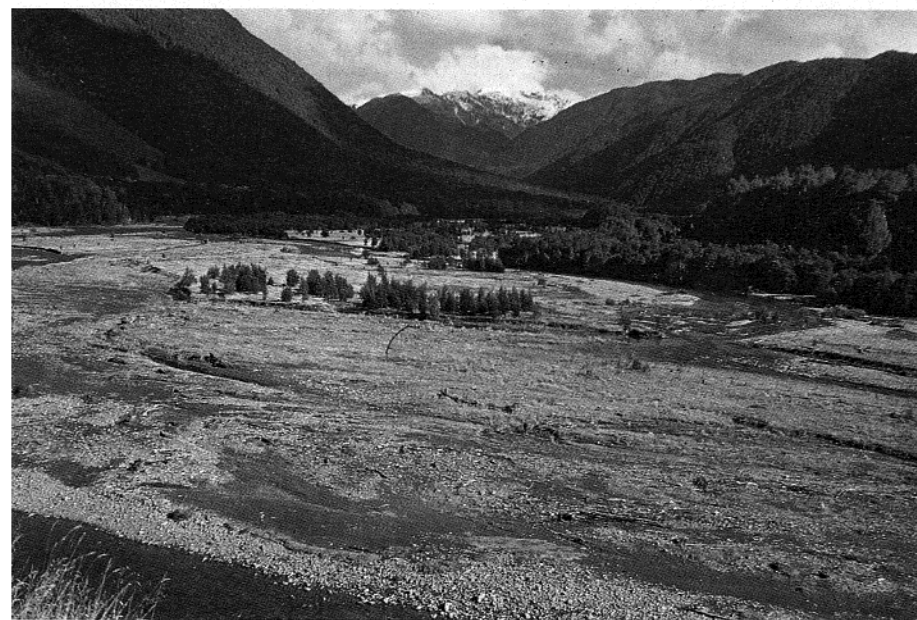
Waitahu River - Montgomerie River - Waitahu Saddle -
Wheel Creek - Maruia River.

The Waitahu valley below Montgomerie Hut is straightforward, either easy river flats with four-wheel-drive track from Gannons Road, or a steep descent from the summit of Garveys Creek Road at the Island Block Coal Mine. This part of the valley is popular with hunting parties.



Crossing Hende River, Wanganui Catchment.

Brian Hunt



Matakitaki Valley.

Les Molloy



Wilkinson Glacier, Whitcombe Catchment.

Geoff Spearpoint



Victoria Range, looking north from slopes of Mt. Haast.

Les Molloy

The Montgomerie is largely untracked and could well be tracked and hutted in its upper portion to Waitahu Saddle. The existing track down past Wheel Creek to the Maruia is very useful for avoiding gorges and waterfalls. If this route were developed it would provide access to the interior and a crossing of the Range within the abilities of most parties. To the south, the headwaters of the Waitahu, Shaw and Tobin Streams would be ideal as NZFS "remote experience" zones; the crest of the Victoria Range in their headwaters is broken and circled. Alpine tarns abound and the headwaters of these valleys are quite rugged.

There are two short tracks into the southern portion of the Victoria Range from the Rahu Scenic Reserve along S.H.7 - up Lake Stream and Duffy Creek. Both should be maintained since they provide the easiest public access for viewing the typical granite bluffs and cirques of the Victoria Range.

(4) May Tops and Rahu Scenic Reserve

The "May Tops" between the Rahu Saddle and the upper Grey are, in effect, a southern extension of the Victoria Range. Mt. Haast is a dominant feature along S.H.7 and provides a relatively easy walk to alpine fell fields, often profuse with flowers and herbs in spring and summer. The Rahu Scenic Reserve, which fringes S.H.7, should be managed in close co-ordination with the State forest hinterland to north and south. It is a magnificent forest foreground to the scenic highway, while the forest park would provide the mountain vistas on the skyline. There is plenty of scope for short nature walks and forest/sub-alpine bog community interpretation and it is to be hoped that complementary management will be achieved in this important zone so close to a major tourist route.

(5) Other features of recreational interest

Both the Maruia and Matakitaki Rivers, in their middle sections, are highly valued by canoeists. Access is good,

the scenery is excellent (a forest and mountain backdrop with some farming) and both rivers have a number of interesting features, especially difficult rapids associated with the 1929 Murchison Earthquake. In both rivers these are known as "Earthquake rapid".

The Granite Pinnacles are an imposing feature of the Rappahannock Valley and the valley itself still retains interest for gold prospectors. There is good walking and an easy route (Rappahannock Saddle) into the Glenroy.

The other feature worth mentioning is the Whitecliffs limestone cave system near Inangahua. Although small and not fully explored they add a further dimension to the recreational variety in the park.

8.4.3. RECREATIONAL AREAS.

(1) Reefton Historic Area (map 6)

One of the most interesting aspects of the Maruia State Forest Park would be the recreational and historic attractions of the quartz reef and conglomerate "cement" goldmining in the greywacke belt around Reefton. The opportunity for short walks and major tramps is almost unlimited. Good relic restoration work has already been carried out by N.Z. Forest Service and local community groups, but much remains to be done. Without a doubt, the wealth of gold and coal mining and sawmilling relics is so widespread that, with proper management, Reefton could become a major holiday centre for New Zealanders. Not a resort for overseas tourists, but a low-cost holiday town attracting families who would want only simple services to assist them in a holiday of fossicking and exploring the historic hills.

Space does not allow an exhaustive documentation of this historic resource, but the following short notes should give some indication of it.

(a) Close to Reefton - easy access

Murray Creek - site of the first quartz reef mine (Golden Treasure) behind Blacks Point. A three hour trip to the Inglewood, Golden Fleece and Ajax mines (including battery);

Crushington - famous huge Wealth of Nations battery at its heyday in 1880's;

Progress Junction - track to Globe Hill Mine with its aerial ropeway down to the Globe Gold Battery (65 stamping heads!) in the Inangahua River opposite Lankeys Creek;

Lankeys Creek - easy 1.2 km track to good relics of gold and coal mining;

Garveys Creek - Island Block Coal mine; a modern open-cast coal mine with environmental pollution from overburden being pushed as moving scree into Waitahu valley; splendid views of Brunner and Victoria Ranges.

(b) Boatmans - Caplestone - Kirwins Hill

Boatmans Creek - Just in Time, Fiery Cross, Lone Star and Welcome gold mines. Also abandoned Boatmans Creek sawmill - last remaining example of water-powered mill, well preserved - supplied timber (1934-51) to maintain water race for Waitahu Gold Sluicing Company. Logging roads may make mill more accessible.

Larrys Creek (Awarau River) - old settlement of Colinton. Site of Caledonian mine with many interesting relics including a Robey Donkey boiler.

Kirwins Hill - a four hour walk from Topfer Creek. Unusual discovery by William Kirwin in 1896 of mountainside at 1200m littered by large blocks of gold-bearing quartz: mother lode never found. Aerial ropeway to battery in Kirwins Creek built in 1900. Closed in 1907 and all equipment abandoned on this very isolated site. An excellent weekend walk across Kirwins to Montgomerie River and out down Waitahu valley.

(c) Merrijigs - Big River

More remote and access by vehicle difficult.

Merrijigs - Golden Lead (well preserved battery), Sir Francis Drake, Cumberland and A1 quartz reef gold mines, all of which gave poor yields and were abandoned by 1914. Also Alborn coal mine.

Big River - lasted longer than other mines in region; major task to haul equipment 25 km to site (7 years after discovery before crushing commenced). Despite vandalism many good relics remain - last remaining poppet-head above main shaft. Still producing in 1933.

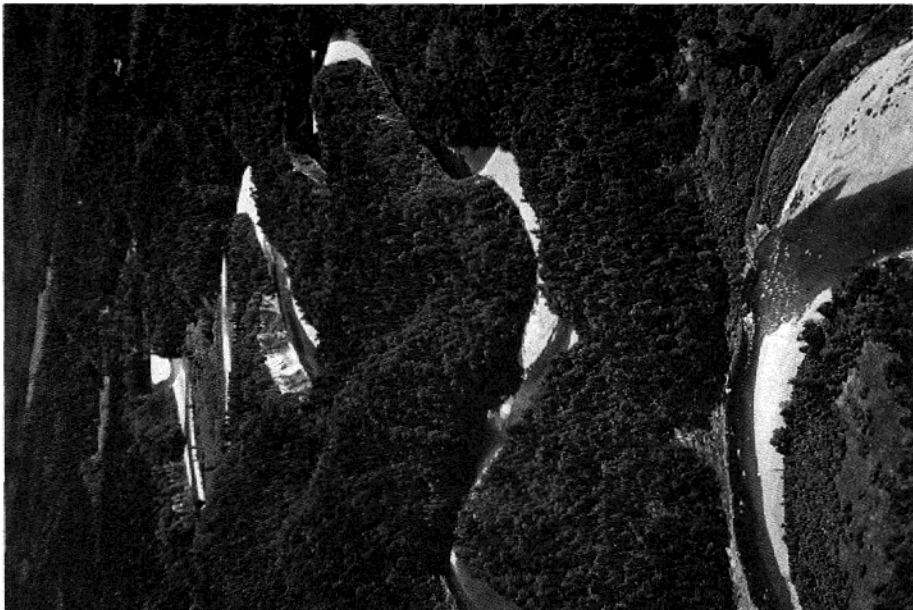
(d) Waiuta

Waiuta - youngest (discovered 1905) and longest-lasting (closed in 1951 through shaft collapse) of Reefton gold mines; second most productive gold mine in N.Z.

(e) Alexander River

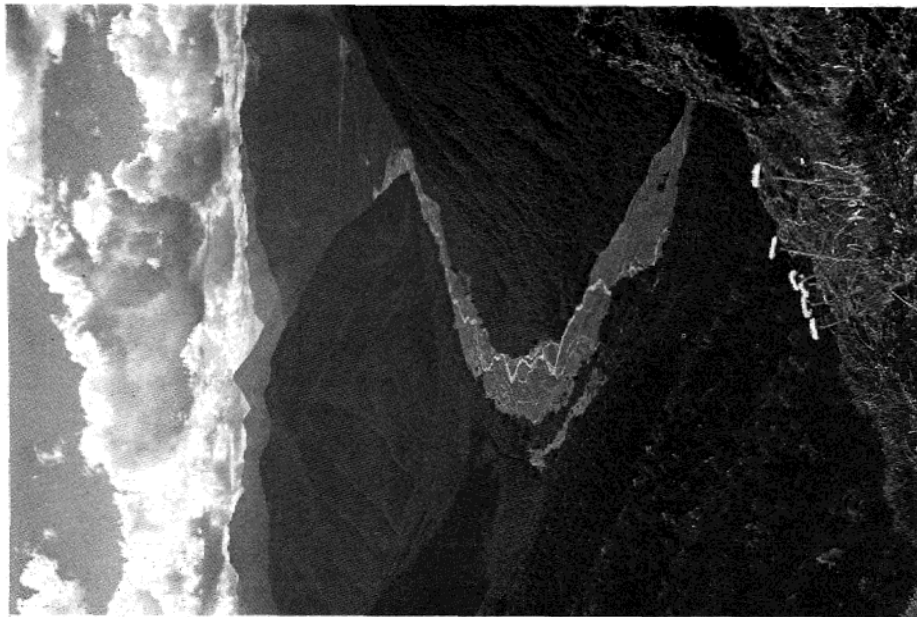
Alexander Gold Mine - not discovered until 1923 and worked during depression. Good pack track to Inangahua (see section 7).

N.Z. Forest Service have uncovered over 30 old tracks (totalling over 100 km) linking the sawmilling, gold and coal mining sites with the population centres. Although many were well benched and graded, most merged back into the second growth forest as the settlements and mines turned into ghost-towns. Some tracks, such as Kirwins and Quigleys (Carton Creek to Big River) are quite major tracks requiring more than one day's travel. This track network will be a major recreational feature of the historical area and the Maruia State Forest Park. Some would be suitable for the New Zealand Walkway and the whole historical/recreational/forest management complex should be sufficient to restore some economic confidence to the Reefton community if it is sensitively developed and promoted. Unfortunately, however, vandalism and souveniring would be major management problems for the Forest Service.



Ahaura Gorge.

Les Molloy



Upper Maruia Valley and Victoria Range from above
Lewis Pass.

Les Molloy



Fox River mouth and canyon, looking across karst
plateau to western face, Paparoa Range.

Guy Salmon



Red Beech forest, Maruia Scenic Reserve.

Les Molloy

(2) Palmer's Recreation Area

The immediate forest environs of Palmers Road near Mary-Maruia Saddle are so parklike and accessible that consideration could be given to a picnic area near the Brown Grey confluence and the forming of a nature walk nearby. Since this area is proposed as an ecological reserve any development would need to be sympathetic with the overriding protective objective. Any form of accommodation would be unsuitable. Nevertheless, the scientific interest begs interpretation - the forest associations and glacial remnants (valley moraine; mosaic of bog forest including cedar; two small valley lakes). In addition there is the remains of an old sawmill nearby at the end of Hunters Road.

(3) Lake Daniells Recreation Area

The popularity of Lake Daniells, and the walk from "the Sluice Box" is already well established. The new hut is popular with fishermen, trampers and naturalists. In fact, popularity is likely to be a major management problem and, already, much of the track has become very muddy and will require restorative work. There is also the added attraction of alluvial gold in Pell Stream and the Alfred River. The region is attractive to prospectors and any major extensions of present mining operations would seriously detract from the recreational attractions.

(4) Maruia Springs Recreation Area

The Maruia Springs are both a recreational attraction and a management problem - as pointed out in the Lewis Pass Study. Since many members of the public will stop at the Springs and adjacent hotel, it is probably an ideal point for an information centre for the proposed Spenser National Park. The impressive red beech forest warrants a good nature walk while another unusual attraction is an old cabin dating from the gold-mining days during the Depression. It is constructed entirely from split beech logs and is roofed with beech shingles.

8.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a "Spenser National Park" be formed -

by extending Nelson Lakes National Park to Lewis Pass, thereby including the upper Matakītaki, Glenroy, Alfred/Lake Daniells, upper Maruia and Upper Lewis valleys.

2. That there be further investigation of the potential national park status of the Lake Christobel/Clear Grey valley.

Meanwhile this area, the lower Brown Grey and the valley floor around Mary-Maruia Saddle should be preserved as an ecological reserve under NZFS management.

3. That a Maruia State Forest Park be designated -

to cover the State forests and unoccupied Crown Lands of the Victoria Range, Brunner Range, May Tops, Robinson - upper Ahaura catchment, Elliot Range, and the hill country between Reefton and the Snowy River.

4. That within this forest park a Reefton Historic Area be designated -

to protect and interpret the gold-mining, coal-mining and sawmilling relics and the old track systems between them.

5. That every effort be made to exclude the Maruia valley from beech sawlog utilisation.

6. That the potential for recreational development of the Lake Daniells, Palmers Road and Maruia Springs area be evaluated -

by NZFS and Lands and Survey Department. Particular care will be required in Palmers Road to acknowledge the scientific importance of the area.

7. That the outstanding scenic and recreational values of this park-like region be recognised by N.Z. Forest Service -

during any future selective logging of the forests. In particular, efforts should be made to show the public aspects of indigenous forest management within the Historic Area and the western portions of the forest park.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

GEOLOGY:

Geological Survey, D.S.I.R. 1964: "Geological map of N.Z." Sheet 15 (Buller), 1:250,000.

VEGETATION:

Kelly, G.C. 1972: Survey of Lewis Pass Scenic Reserve. In "Scenic Reserves of Canterbury". Biological Survey of Reserves. Report 2 Botany Division, D.S.I.R.: 131-5.

Kelly, G.C.; Given, D.R. 1976: Rare and local plants of the West Coast Beech Project area. Beech Research News 4: 16 - 24.

HISTORY:

Blackadder, W. 1958: 'Old Bill's Story. Lincoln Agric. College Rural Education Bulletin 13(3): 35-58.

Brown, M.C. 1976: Difficult Country: an informal history of Murchison. Murchison Historical and Museum Society. 262 pp.

RECREATION:

Johnston, A.D.; Staton, J.A.; Gillman, E.A. 1977: Scenic, recreational and historic values of the West West Coast beech project area. Paper presented at NZFS Hokitika Seminar, 22 pp.

RESOURCE PLANNING:

Lands and Survey Department, 1977: The Lewis Pass Region: an investigation for the National Parks Authority. D. J. Alexander, M.P. Neeson, N.C. Simpson, September 1977. 116 pp(+ appendices).