

# MATIRI - KARAMEA - HEAPHY

*"At half a mile beyond our encampment we ascended the hill to avoid a steep rocky projection (Heaphy Bluff) which was impossible to go round. The way was both steep and tedious, through a tangled wood of rata and kiekie. From the summit, an elevation of about 700 feet, we looked down inland upon a beautiful wooded valley, which lies upon the banks of the Wakapoai (Heaphy) - a stream which descends from near the source of the Hauriri (Aorere) of Massacre Bay (Golden Bay), and which runs into the sea at this place. A pine forest was visible a few miles up the opening, and the natives report the existence of a considerable tract of level land farther up, fit, they say, for the cultivation of wheat. Circumstances would not allow of our exploring this valley, and no estimate could be formed of the extent of available country from the coast".*

Charles Heaphy

"Notes of an expedition to Kawatiri and Araura, on the West Coast of the Middle Island". 17 April, 1846.

## 10.1. LANDFORMS

North of the Buller Gorges the landscape is predominantly mountainous and includes some of the oldest and most complex rocks in the West Coast. North of Westport to the Mokihinui River a narrow coastal plain is backed by the Mt. William Range, a complex of Tertiary sandstones and conglomerates (Coal Measures), ancient greywacke (Greenland Group), granite and gneiss. To the east, a number of major faults (Glasgow, Lyell and White Creek) traverse larger blocks of pre-Cambrian greywackes (Waiuta Group) and granites that comprise the Glasgow and Matiri Ranges. The Matiri Range is a particularly interesting landform -

consisting of soft Tertiary sediments (Matiri Formation), including flat-topped gently-folded limestone, capping granite summits between 800 - 1300 m.

North of the Mokihinui River the central belt of granite widens to encompass the middle gorges of the Karamea River and the western portion of the Tasman Mountains and the Heaphy River catchment. To the east, this granite grades into schists and greywackes. This mountainous landscape is badly scarred by the effects of the Murchison (1929) and Inangahua (1968) earthquakes. For instance, the effect of the Murchison earthquake on the mid-Karamea gorges caused a series of landslips to dam many short sections of the river to form deep pools. A similar large slip in the upper Mokihinui created a lake (Lake Perrine) which then silted up in 10 years.

## 10.2. VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Podocarp/beechn forest still predominates in lowlands and valley floors of the Buller, Ngakawau, Mokihinui, Matiri, Karamea and Heaphy Rivers. Much of this forest in the western lowlands is not logged, with the remaining virgin tracts found in the Ngakawau, Mokihinui, Little Wanganui and Oparara catchments.

The slopes of most of the ranges - Glasgow, Lyell, Matiri, Tasman Mountains - are almost entirely covered by pure beech forest (predominantly silver and mountain). Minor upland forest species include kaikawaka, mountain toatoa, yellow-silver pine, and pink pine. Above bushline, the rolling subalpine downs (e.g. "10,000 acre plateau" of the Matiri Tops, and Gouland, MacKay and Gunner Downs) are characteristically covered with red tussock and the usual shrubs of Olearia, Coprosma and Hebe spp.

### 10.3. EXPLORATION HISTORY

This far-flung northern-most corner of Westland (or N.W. Nelson) is still largely unknown in terms of its flora and fauna. To some extent the biota are "refugia", having escaped the extensive Pleistocene glaciation which stripped away the soils and vegetation further to the south. The Scientific Co-ordinating Committee (SCC) has not been able to investigate the forests of the Karamea district as yet and only one ecological reserve, Fenian (4400 ha between the Oparara River and Karamea Gorge), has been tentatively suggested by the N.W. Nelson State Forest Park Advisory Committee. Further south, the SCC has recommended a Ngakawau/Orikaka ecological area (15,500 ha in the Oriakaka River catchment north of the lower Buller Gorge) to preserve a sequence of the remaining vegetation extending from the coast to the alpine flora of the Glasgow Range. A distinctive feature is the cedar/beech/podocarp forest of the cold, wet basin of the upper Oriakaka as well as the complex red/silver/hard beech associations which achieve some of their fullest development in this part of North Westland.

The fauna of the region is thought to be diverse but is not well known because of the isolation of the region. Kakapo were still present in the Karamea catchment in considerable numbers during the Depression (cf. Kakapo River and Kakapo Spur). The Goulard Downs region (first declared a sanctuary in 1915) is renowned for the numbers of South Island Spotted Kiwis (especially the larger), Blue Mountain Duck, and the large Paryphanta snails and bush worms that thrive in the swampy red tussockland fringed by stunted silver beech and pygmy pine. Red deer are well distributed throughout the region but their numbers are kept low by commercial hunting.

The outstanding vegetational feature along the coastline is the dense groves of nikau palms which are such an attractive feature of the section of the Heaphy Track between the mouths of the Heaphy River and the Kohaihai River.

The coastline between Farewell Spit and the Buller was first explored by Europeans when Charles Heaphy, Thomas Brunner and the Maoria Kehu and Ekau made their major journey from Nelson to the Arahura in the autumn of 1846. However, the Maoris probably already used the routes of the present-day Heaphy and Wangapeka Tracks, particularly for trading with or raiding the greenstone of the remote Arahura settlement of the Ngai Tahu tribe (dispersed from Kaiapoi in Canterbury after the main Ngai Tahu settlement had been sacked by Te Rauparaha).

As early as 1856, James MacKay, warden of the Collingwood Goldfields, suggested that there should be a good route to link Collingwood to the West Coast; he eventually traversed the Heaphy Track route between the Heaphy and the Aorere in 1860 when returning from the purchase of the West Coast from the Maori people. The existence of a large tract of grazing land (Goulard Downs) had already been reported by a number of prospectors. Subsequent attempts at pasturing by Goulard and others failed but the importance of the route was such that the work of Saxon and Lewis ensured that a track was surveyed and built between 1882 and 1900. By 1907 the Track had overgrown because prospecting of the Downlands was a failure.

Two other major tracks - the Lyell/Mokihinui and Wangapeka - were built in stages from the days of the gold rushes of the 1860's and 1870's. Gold was discovered in the Wangapeka, Rolling and Sherry Rivers as early as 1859-60. This led to prospectors crossing the Herbert Range to Te Namu and a number of small towns - Bush End, Bell Town - sprang up as the government attempted to push a road across Wangapeka Saddle. Earlier, the explorer John Rochfort had blazed a track up the Wangapeka and down to the Karamea Bend (junction with the Leslie). In the years of the Depression the track was used by prospectors exploring the Mt. Radiant and Anaconda regions of the Radiant Range and Little Wanganui catchment for silver, copper, molybdenite and gold.

Gold (alluvial) was discovered at Lyell in 1862 and at Mokihinui in 1865; both settlements enjoyed a second lease of life when gold was discovered in extensive quartz reefs after the alluvial gold was exhausted. Consequently, both regions were still in their heyday in the early 1900's. The Lyell/Mokihinui pack track avoided the long arduous journey down the Buller by crossing to the south branch of the Mokihinui from the Lyell River, thence to the main Mokihinui and Seddonville.

## 10.4. RECREATIONAL ATTRACTIONS

The recreational attractions of this, the northernmost part of the West Coast, are very diverse; access is generally better than in many other parts of the West Coast as most of the mountainous country can be approached from Golden Bay, Nelson or Buller.

As with the rest of North Westland the recreational attractions are generally twofold:

- (a) the potential for active recreation in the natural montane zone, plus specific sections of the coastal area (especially Kohaihai River to Kahurangi Point),
- (b) the cultural features associated with gold and coal mining in the Mt. William Range and all the major rivers draining the area.

Perhaps most of this natural outdoor recreational resource lies inside the western portion of North-West Nelson State Forest Park, which at 380,000 ha is the largest forest park in the country. This forest park is traversed by the popular Heaphy Track which is one of the outstanding mountain/coastal walks in New Zealand. The Track is so popular that the 4000 people who walk it annually constitute a management problem in terms of their accommodation and their impact upon the physical state of the Track. Despite

these problems management by the N.Z. Forest Service and its public advisory committee has generally been responsive to public needs and sensitive to the need to preserve the remarkable biota and scenic attractions of the Heaphy region.

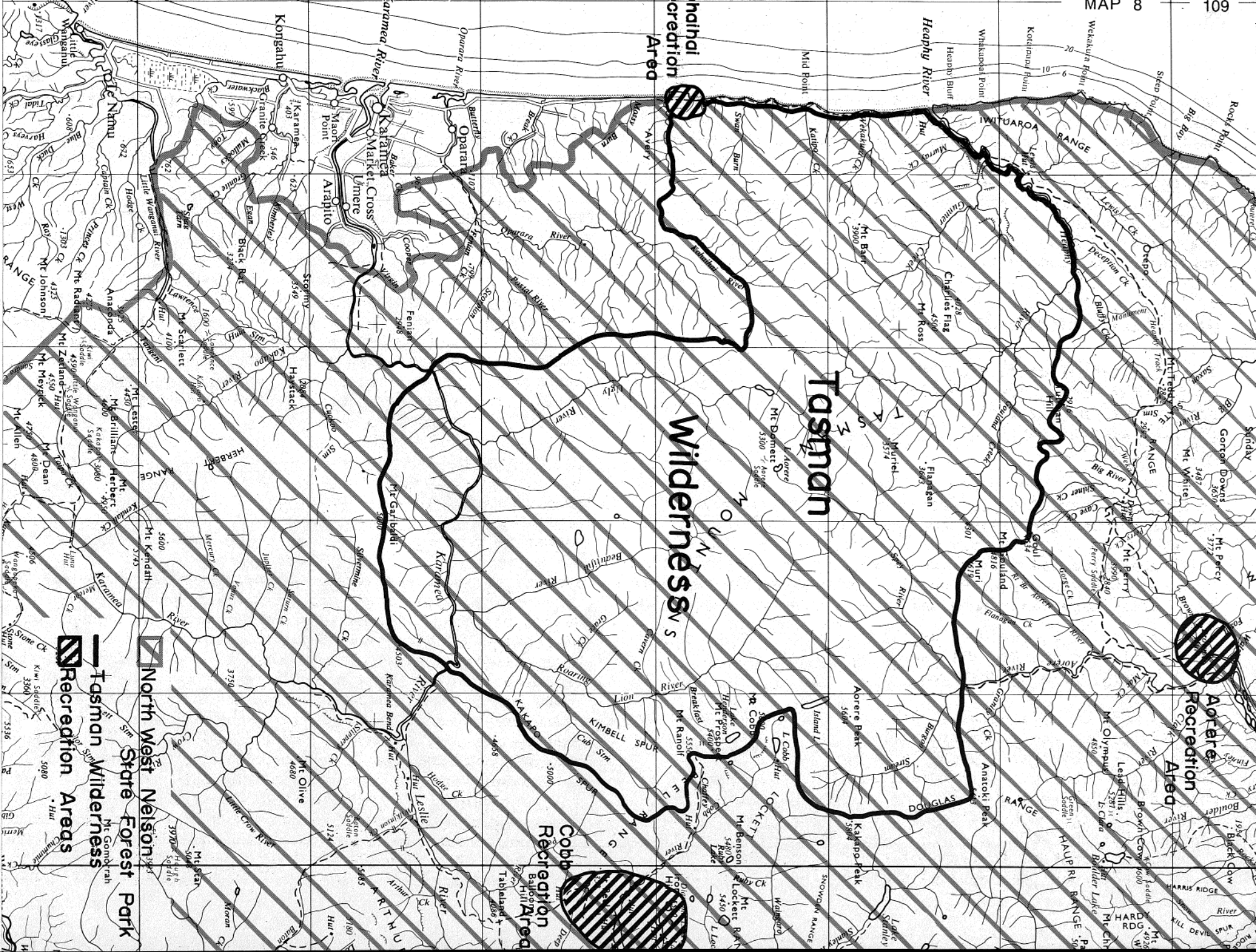
It is interesting that the Heaphy Track, with its popular appeal, is adjacent to one of the outstanding areas of wilderness, not just on the West Coast but in New Zealand - the mid-Karamea catchment and the Tasman mountains. This co-existence for such a long period indicates the value of the "honey-pot" planning principle whereby one natural area can be preserved by providing alternative attractions for the public in another area. If done sensibly, without regulations, permits and thoughtless publicity, recreational users will generally gravitate towards a resource which matches their natural interests and abilities.

## 10.5. ZONING

### 10.5.1. WILDERNESS

#### Tasman Wilderness

The Tasman Wilderness Area, of approx. 80,000 ha is shown in map 8. It lies completely within the boundaries of N.W. Nelson State Forest Park and extends from the Cobb catchment watershed (Peel Range) in the east almost to the Tasman Sea coastline between Kohaihai and Heaphy Rivers in the west. In the north, the Tasman Wilderness Area extends to within 5 km of the Heaphy Track, i.e. the low dividing ridge between Goulard Creek (tributary of the Heaphy River) and the Big River draining the Goulard Downs. In the south the zone includes the gorge mid-Karamea River between Kakapo Spur and the catchment of the Ugly River. In this southern region the proposed zone departs markedly from the recent proposals (June 1978) of the N.Z. Forest Service (Nelson Conservancy) which excluded the bed of the Karamea, presumably to allow the eventual establishment of a track system down river from the junction with the Leslie River



# Tasman

## Wilderness

North West Nelson Forest Park

Tasman Wilderness

Tasman Recreation Areas

Cobb Recreation Area

Aorere Recreation Area

Aorere Forest Park

Aorere

at the Karamea Bend. Any such track development would be regrettable in view of the wilderness values downstream and, as yet, the public have not been given the opportunity to comment on any management plan for the forest park.

#### The NZFS proposal for a N.W. Nelson Wilderness Area

The NZFS proposal to create a large wilderness in the Tasman Mountains in N.W. Nelson State Forest Park was bound to run into the same sort of opposition that had plagued the proposals for ecological reserves in the beech scheme area of the Grey/Inangahua/Maruia valleys.

With hindsight, the NZFS probably recognise that the N.W. Nelson wilderness area proposal was offered to a public largely ignorant of the nature and values of wilderness. The document (NZFS, 1978) was a bald presentation of boundaries and somewhat irrelevant maps of geology and forest types; there was no real attempt to justify the proposals on recreational/preservation grounds nor was there any attempt to assess the socio-economic impact, if any, of the proposals. The public reaction was very predictable, largely mirroring the response one year earlier to the NZFS proposals for the future management of the indigenous forests of the West Coast. Of the 89 submissions, 44 (mainly individuals and recreation and conservation groups) were for it and 45 (mainly local individuals, service groups, local bodies and mining interests) were against it. Government departments were divided. In such a polarised atmosphere the Minister of Forest's decision to "postpone for five years any decision" was almost predictable.

In his press statement of 3 November 1978, the Minister of Forests stated that:

"The depth of the opposition was demonstrated by the number of individuals and small groups forwarding submissions. However, many groups showed a disappointing lack of understanding over the extent and effects of the proposals. Most of the objections revolved

around the potential loss to the national economy and the West Coast economy of the resources, particularly the mineral resources, of the area. Associated with this were objections that the wilderness area would be a block in the way of the Collingwood-Karamea road with its expected boost to tourism. It was also suggested that there was inadequate justification for the proposal and that wilderness had not been shown to be the best land use for the area".

Most of these objections, except the possibility of mineral resources, do not stand up to close examination; the amount of merchantable forest is negligible and the Karamea hydro potential is downstream of the Wilderness Area. The wilderness would not impinge on the Collingwood-Karamea road, if such a road ever eventuates. The claim of inadequate justification is fair comment.

Another significant aspect of the Minister's announcement was the claim that during this five-year period "... the Mines Department would carry out a complete mineral survey, and prepare a report on the area." Meanwhile the area would be "... managed so that the future adoption of a wilderness option is not jeopardised."

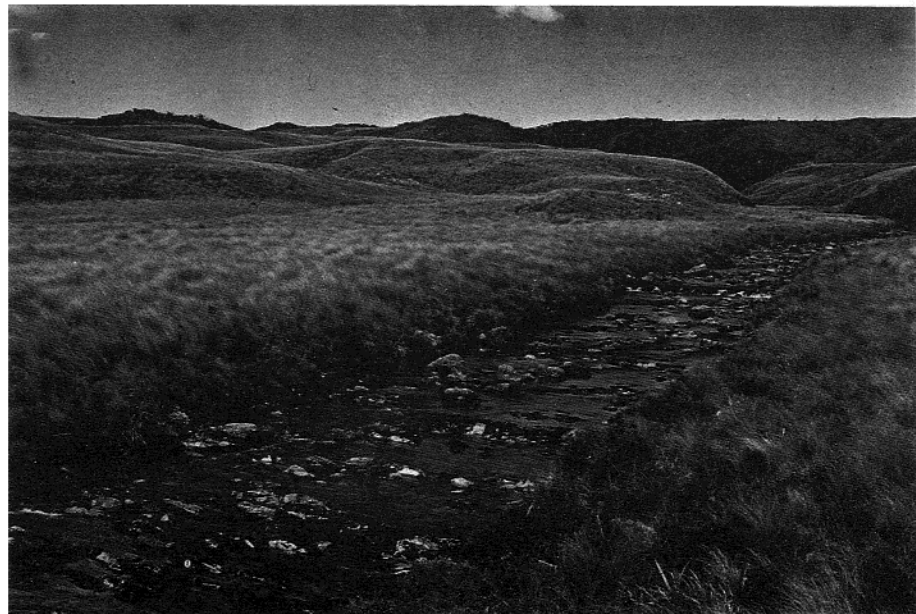
If the Mines Department do carry out a "complete mineral survey" of the area, it will certainly be an interesting development for it is well known that they have hardly any mineral geologists. What is more likely to happen is that prospecting by private companies will be encouraged during this period and in fact, shortly after his statement, the Minister of Forests gave his consent for Amoco Minerals Ltd to prospect an area of 4000 ha in the headwaters of the Roaring Lion Valley in the centre of the proposed wilderness area.

Prospecting by private companies would in no way constitute a thorough assessment of the mineral resources of the area and there is a high probability that if prospecting by Amoco and any other private companies proved inconclusive



Tussock-covered plateaux around head of Larrikans Creek, Matiri Range.

*Les Molloy*



Big River, Goulund Downs, N.W. Nelson State Forest Park.

*Les Molloy*



Lake Henderson and Domett Range from Peel Range, Tasman Wilderness, N.W. Nelson State Forest Park.

*Les Molloy*



Heaphy coastline, looking north.

*Les Molloy*

Mines Department would seek a further deferral in five years time. This, after all, has been the pattern further south in the Red Mountain ultramafics in the proposed Olivine Wilderness (Molloy, 1977).

The whole heated question of prospecting such areas as the N.W. Nelson Wilderness would be largely defused if the Minister of Mines, Mines Department and sections of the mining industry would accept the failure of section 57 of the Mining Act 1971 as it applied to land of high value for nature conservation (national parks, reserves, forest parks, sanctuaries, etc.). With the recent 1978 amendment to the Mining Act, government rectified the conflict in national parks (since the Minister of Lands previously refused his consent to a prospecting licence since this could then be automatically exchanged for a mining licence if the prospect proved favourable). However, the then Minister of Mines, Mr Gair, curiously refused to accept that there should also be a "2-stage approach" (separate prospecting and mining licences) for State Forest - even though it is known that the NZFS, through the Minister of Forests, sought to have the amendment extended to State Forests.

There is no doubt that the NZFS has suffered loss of prestige over the N.W. Nelson wilderness decision. The harshest environmental critics of the NZFS have long claimed that the Forests Act is not sufficient safeguard concerning the preservation of New Zealand's forest heritage, and in section 1.7. of this document serious reservations are expressed about the likelihood of ever achieving a New Zealand Wilderness Preservation System through the Forests Act with its overwhelming "multiple-use" philosophy. If the NZFS are unable to achieve any significant wilderness preservation under the Forests Act, then it is probably inevitable that recreation and conservation organisations will exert much greater pressure for the formation of a type of "Nature Conservancy" with a clear preservation mandate, unfettered by a multiple-use philosophy (Molloy, 1979).

## 10.5.2. NATURAL AREA

The bulk of the remaining forested land between the Buller and the Heaphy is zoned natural area; much of this area is within N.W. Nelson State Forest Park, as shown in map 8. The two popular walking tracks, Heaphy and Wangapeka, as well as the old Lyell/Seddonville pack track lie within the natural area zone and constitute the most popular recreational routes. Management of the natural area should be to enhance recreational opportunities which are generally extensive tramping, hunting, fishing, canoeing or gold-fossicking. A number of areas and features are worthy of discussion, as follows:

### Matiri Range

The Matiri Range is a landform unique to the West Coast (see 10.1.). The series of red-tussock covered, flat-topped, plateaux between the Matiri River and the branches of the Mokihinui are guarded by an impressive rampart of limestone cliffs and steep, forested faces. In sunlight the undulating plateaux are warm and golden; in mist they are very difficult to navigate through lack of landmarks and periodic sinkholes and depressions. Overall, the impression is one of vast space. The Range has three main plateaux systems:

- southernmost (Thousand Acre Plateau)
- central (Ten Thousand Acre Plateau), between Larrikins Creek and the Matiri,
- western plateau around Mt. Misery and the Needle.

Some tracking and hutting has been carried out to date between Lake Matiri and the central plateau with a poled route to below the Haystack at the head of Larrikins Creek. There is a good case for developing a comprehensive recreational plan for the region (Matiri and Mokihinui State forests) which would outline the ultimate extension of this hut and track system. A route exists down Larrikins Creek to the south branch of the Mokihinui and thence good walking down to the main Mokihinui and on through the gorge

pack track to Seddonville or upstream to the old mining track across the saddle to the Lyell. This old track is currently being cleared by NZFS and the Lyell Historic Reserve (including cemetery) has been opened up by Lands and Survey Department. Another variant is to head up the north branch of the Mokihinui to the Johnson River and across the Allen Range via Kiwi Saddle to the Wangapeka Track in the Little Wanganui Valley. Again, some of this route (known as the "Johnson Track") is in need of clearing and maintenance.

There is probably a good case for extending the N.W. Nelson State Forest Park southwards to incorporate the catchments of the Mokihinui and Matiri Rivers, thereby unifying their recreational development with that of the Karamea and Little Wanganui.

#### The "Collingwood - Karamea Road"

During the early 1970's local bodies in Buller and Golden Bay campaigned for a government commitment to a tourist road between the Aorere Valley in Golden Bay and the coast at Kohaihai. The preferred route was Kahurangi Point - MacKay Downs - Lewis Hut - Heaphy - coastline to Kohaihai and would effectively eliminate 25 km of the Heaphy Track.

The proposal united recreational organisations in opposition to any road and the outright opposition of FMC to any such proposal was made clear on many occasions (Henson, 1978). Fortunately, the issue is now dead or at least very dormant - a victim of the colder economic climate and an increasing public awareness of such a frivolous use of government revenue in view of the high cost of maintaining our existing network of roads especially those in mountainous areas.

### 10.5.3. MULTIPLE-USE AREAS

The multiple-use zone is appropriate for a number of forested areas in the region because a number of recreational uses are compatible with their existing or proposed uses for forestry, mining or hydro-electric generation.

#### Buller coalfields

Historically the Buller coalfields on the bleak plateaux on the western side of the Mt. William Range have probably been New Zealand's most important source of coal. There is a wealth of recreational/historical interest associated with past and existing mining in the region:

- Denniston and the famous Denniston Incline built in 1878 and operated until 1967;
- Stockton Plateau and the Stockton opencast mine; aerial ropeway transporting coal to Ngakawau;
- impressive Ngakawau Gorge, a forested slit gorge; the scenic attractions of Charming Creek with its old railway track leading up from the Charming Creek Mine.

#### Oparara Basin

The Oparara Basin, north of Karamea, has recently been highlighted by NFAC as an area of controversial logging of State forest. The basin is another area which is relatively unknown with regard to its ecological and recreational values. The logging roads have provided access but there is an urgent need for a management plan which incorporates ecological reserves (e.g. the so-called Fenian reserve) and protects recreational features, especially the environs of the Oparara River. There are several interesting limestone features in the area including two great arches spanning the river.



Logging, Little Wanganui

There is a danger that logging in the vicinity of Scobie's Clearing in the Lower Little Wanganui will seriously detract from the forested views along the last few kilometres of the Wangapeka Track. Much of the logging in the region (e.g. Camp Stream) falls far short of the "selection logging" envisaged by the NZFS under the revised indigenous forest policy. It is hoped that the re-negotiation and relocation of cutting rights (West Coast Forest Policy 1978, item 13) will remove this problem.

## 10.5.4. RECREATION AREAS

Kohaihai Recreation Area (map 8)

The beginning of the Heaphy Track at the mouth of the Kohaihai River is already a popular picnic area and NZFS information centre during the summer holiday period. The 3 km walk over the Kohaihai Bluff to Scotts Beach is extremely attractive, affording views of the coastline north to the Heaphy Bluff. The groves of nikau palms in the Kohaihai and the windshorn podocarp/hardwood forest are visually attractive and worthy of interpretation by the development of nature walks, etc.

Cobb Recreation Area (map 8)

The Cobb Recreation Area at the head of the Cobb reservoir is strictly outside the West Coast, but it is an important entry point to N.W. Nelson State Forest Park. It has an interesting moraine landscape and is famous for the local rocks containing Trilobite fossils.

Aorere Recreation Area

This proposed zone is also outside the West Coast but lies at the Golden Bay end of the Heaphy Track around Browns Hut. The NZFS have already considerably upgraded the area and the comments made for the Kohaihai area apply here also.

## 10.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Tasman Wilderness Area (as outlined in map 8) be designated a wilderness area in terms of the Forests Act -

when the proposal is reviewed in 1983.

2. That the NZFS extend N.W. Nelson State Forest Park south to include the Mokihinui and Matiri State Forests.

3. That a management plan for N.Z. Nelson State Forest Park be made available for public comment as a matter of urgency.

4. That efforts to protect the scientific/recreational values of the Oparara Basin be accelerated and publicly evaluated through a management plan for the production forests of the Karamea area.

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## FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

### GEOLOGY

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### EXPLORATION HISTORY

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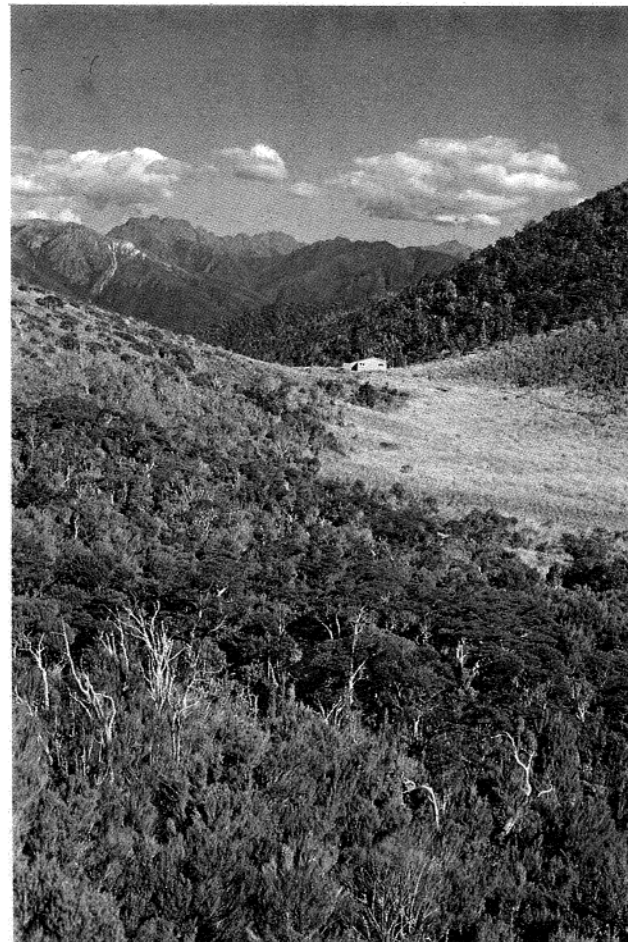
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Perry Saddle Hut and Anatoki Peaks, Heaphy Track, N.W. Nelson Forest Park.

*Les Molloy*