

WEST WANAKA, Young Range, Hunter Valley

1. Landforms

Within the catchments of Lakes Wanaka and Hawea, and outside the boundaries of the Mount Aspiring National Park, is an extensive mountain complex. 'West Wanaka' covers an area considerably larger than the run of the same name, and includes all the country between Lake Wanaka and the national park, bounded by the Wilkin and Matukituki valleys to the north and south respectively. The Young Range is a distinct massif between the Makarora Valley and Lake Hawea, merging northwards into the main divide headwaters of the Hunter Valley. The isolated 'Mt Burke Range' is an extension south of The Neck between the two lakes.

The alpine schists of these mountains have been subjected to the same mountain-building and erosion processes as the adjacent alps. A succession of ice advances during the Pleistocene sculptured the major landforms that are so prevalent today.

The most obvious features are the lakes, filling glaciated depressions. Rock surfaces on steep valley walls are mamillated by ice-scouring, with ice-plucked *roche moutonnées* abruptly rising from valley floors or as islands and promontories above Lake Wanaka. Glacial deposition is less frequent. However, the Hawea glacier terminal moraine on which the Hawea township is built, is one of the more obvious features.

The 'West Wanaka' district is dissected by a series of generally parallel valleys draining the East Matukituki and Wilkin divides towards Lake Wanaka. The Craigie, Albert, Estuary and Minaret Burns have multiple cirque headwaters. The Albert Burn, as the largest of these catchments, has six basin cirques. The lower reaches of these valleys tend to be straight-coursed, breaching a regular ice-graded lake-shore face. This rises 1200-1600 m to the crest of truncated ridges, indicating the maximum ice depth during the Pleistocene. The crest height of these ridges varies between 1900 and 2350 m between their eastern extremities and the Matukituki and Wilkin divides. Mt Alta (2350 m), Minaret Peak (2210 m), Triple Peak (2195 m) and Dragonfly Peak (2175 m) are the highest peaks, all being in the southern part of the district. Mts Aspinall, Lois, Twilight and Jumbo on the Albert Burn-Wilkin divide are all peaks between 1908 and 2136 m. Post glacial mass movement of valley walls, by either slumping or faulting, has produced widespread hummocky surfaces, alternating with exposed bedrock.

The 'Mt Burke Range' has a regular and rounded crest at 1200-1400 m elevation, being more reminiscent of Central Otago block mountains, than the dissected mountains within most of this region. The unrelenting Lake Wanaka face has been ice scoured, with The Peninsula, enclosing Stevensons Arm, being very steep-sided.

The Young Range is a more confused mass, with a large number of catchments, either draining eastward into the Hunter Valley and Lake Hawea, or westward into the Makarora and Lake Wanaka. Steeply dipping and finely foliated schists have resulted in fluted and deeply dissected faces in the east. Mts Sentinel and Gold present particularly jagged appearances, being prominent from State Highway 6.

From The Neck, the steep and dissected terrain rises to 2000 m in the north. Terrace Peak and Mts Constitution, Patriarch and Shrimpton are the highest summits. The McKerrow Range, above the lower Makarora Valley, presents the only regular feature in the district, with an evenly graded and lightly dissected western face 1200-1500 m high. Further to the north, the Young Range divide between the upper Makarora and Hunter joins the main divide at Mt Brewster (2440 m). Northwards along the divide, the mountains become more alpine, with Mts Enderby and Holdsworth having permanent snowfields and small shelf-glaciers.

The main divide above the east branch of the Hunter exhibits a truly alpine character, with extensive glaciers on an amphitheatre cirque-wall 2100 m high, peaking at 2320 m on Mt Strauchon. On a clear day, this fine peak is prominent from Hawea township 80 km away, dominating the head of the Hunter Valley.

The Hunter Valley has a broad, almost flat floor, running on a straight course from the head of Lake Hawea for 30 km to the Forks, where there is an abrupt transition from a meandering river on braided flats, to mountain torrents in the short east and west branches.

The western face of the Hunter-Dingle/Ahuriri dividing range rises along an unbroken crest at 1900 m in the south, to 2400 m at Mts Barth and Huxley in the north. Numerous small creeks drain this imposing face, which is unbroken by any major valleys or low passes.

Albert Burn Valley.

Photo: Donald Lousley



2. Vegetation and Wildlife

2.1 Vegetation

...At our feet thousands of feet below, was the Hawea Lake, deep, blue and narrow, surrounded by extensive forests reaching the white gravelly shores. About five miles westward lay the Wanaka Lake, more open but broken with promontories and islets, and having the peculiarity, marked in all Maori sketches, of a long narrow eastern arm. [Stevensons Arm]. Excepting on their southerly shores these lakes were hemmed in by bold and lofty mountains. Those round Hawea being covered by timber to the snow line, but round Wanaka timber is scarcer.

Surveyor J.T. Thomson, 18 December 1857, from Grandview Mountain.¹

The region is botanically interesting for its diversity. This is due to it being in the climatic transition between the wet main divide mountains and the rain-shadow ranges and basins of Central Otago. There are dramatic changes in precipitation relative to distance from the main divide. Rainfall is around 2000 mm per year on the western side of Lake Wanaka and at the head of both lakes, dropping to 600-700 mm on the Upper Clutha Flats only a few km away. Along this sharp rainfall gradient, forest plants drop out one by one as conditions become too dry, and their place is taken by various scrub communities. In turn these become less dense in the east as the shrubs become admixed with grassland and bracken fern.²

Much has changed since European settlement. The forests on the valley floors of the Matukituki and Makarora, and along the shores of Lake Hawea, have disappeared. These were predominantly red and silver beech in the mid-Matukituki and podocarps on alluvial outwash fans in the Makarora Valley. Both valley floors, in their lower reaches, were covered with flax, cabbage tree, and tree ferns 2-3 m high, forming an impenetrable obstacle for travel.³

...To get over the difficulty in our attempt to reach the bush we started a fire at the head of the lake (1860). This soon developed into one unbroken, seething ocean of flame from hillside to hillside and fanned by a southerly wind, it raged for three days and nights, traveling up the valley 20 miles. It was a terrific blaze, that leveled everything in its course. This great fire transferred the appearance of the country, so that in March 1865, when the late explorer William Doeherty and I started on our exploring trip by way of Lake Wanaka, the Makarora Valley presented a beautiful carpet of luxuriant grass, over which it was a pleasure to travel.

The Memory Log of G.M. Hassing⁴

On the floor of the Matukituki Valley could be found several species of *olearia* and *coprosma*, and matagouri with stems up to 20 cm in diameter.⁵ In 1862 this scrub was an obstacle to the first surveyors. "...for the first two hundred yards or so we had to creep on our hands and knees from the bank of the (Matukituki) river till we gained the foot of the mountain, through among thick growing, high overtopping scrub."⁶ Hawea Flat had clumps of matagouri, speargrass and scrubby gullies instead of today's irrigated pastures.⁷

Above 700 m, dependent on aspect, today's predominant vegetation is tall tussock grassland. The narrow-leaved snowgrass is dominant, with the mid-rib snowgrass in the wetter areas close to the main divide. These grasslands are in fair

condition, being only moderately depleted by pastoral activities, except for the 'Mt Burke Range' where it is severely depleted.⁸ In drier areas tall tussock has been succeeded by short fescue tussock, generally as a narrow altitudinal zone above bracken fern belts along the lake faces. Pasture grasses dominate lower slopes, valley floors and where oversowing with grasses and clovers have replaced bracken and tussock.

Ribbons of beech and broad-leaved species in gullies are remnants of once considerably more extensive forests. In 1865 it was recorded that the West Wanaka lake faces were clothed in beech forest with patches of *dacrydium*, *podocarpus*, and *phyllocladus* species.⁹ Today it is predominantly covered by bracken fern. In the west extensive silver beech forests remain, in particular the Albert Burn, East Matukituki, and upper Makarora, with Hall's totara present at higher altitudes. Extensive pockets of pure mountain beech clothe many of the drier Hunter Valley catchments, but the former extent of forest has been severely reduced by burning and localised milling. Kidds Bush, on the shores of Lake Hawea, is the only locality where an unbroken beech canopy extends from shore-line to (fire-modified) upper bushline.

Broad shrub belts above present bushlines, and on shady faces, indicate the former extent of forest. In places impenetrable stands of mingimingi, *hebes*, mountain celery pine and *dracophyllum* species are colonising formerly burnt forest areas. Alluvium in many river valleys supports dense stands of matagouri. In the drier Mts Burke and Gold area, colonisation by manuka is occurring over depleted short tussock grassland.

In the alpine zone, herbfields occur only to a limited extent, with fellfield and screes being more prevalent. In 1865 Buchanan listed the alpine species to be found on Mt Alta, concluding that this locality on West Wanaka demonstrated the richness of Otago's alpine flora. He further described the sub-alpine zone as "characterized by a belt of coarse tussock grasses, *celmisia*, (veronica) and *ranunculus*," but noted the presence of sheep tracks as high as 1830 m.¹⁰ Continuous screes along the Hunter-Ahuriri divide indicate greywacke basement, rather than the schists which predominate throughout the region.

Most of the area lies within the Wanaka and Huxley Ecological Districts of the Lakes Ecological Region. The wetter margins upvalley from Lake Wanaka are within two districts of the Aspiring Ecological Region.¹¹

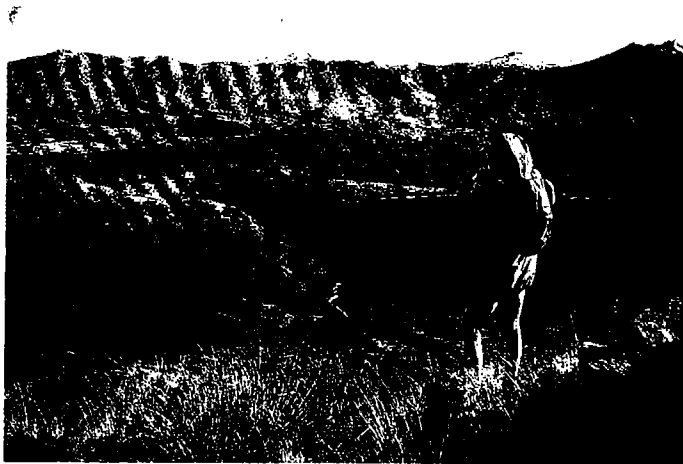
2.2 Wildlife

Fires and introduced predators quickly depleted wildfowl, which, along with eels, provided a reliable food source during Maori occupation, as well as for the first Europeans. In 1861 the Upper Clutha Valley was covered by a luxuriant growth of native grasses and abounded with native quail and the incautiously curious weka.¹² The quail suddenly became extinct shortly after first European settlement. The first runholder at the head of Lake Hawea reported in 1868 that "a year or two before quail were so numerous that the cats would bring in two or three a day, and next year there was not a quail to be seen."¹³

With complete habitat changes at lower altitudes, the remaining birdlife is concentrated on lakes and tarns, bush and bush margins. Valley wetlands and river beds provide habitat for paradise shelduck, scarp, pied oystercatcher, banded dotterel, black-fronted tern, wrybill plover, gulls, Canada geese and spur-winged plover. The pipit and harrier hawk are widely distributed throughout the grasslands, as is the kea throughout alpine zones.

Tomtits, wood pigeon, bellbird, grey warbler and brown creeper are common throughout remaining forest areas, with long-tailed cuckoo and parakeet also present. Birdlife is nowhere as abundant and diverse as previously. In 1860 at the mouth of the Minaret Burn "the bush teemed with plump pigeons and kakas, which in the evenings we knocked down with a long stick, killing as many as we required."¹⁴

Red deer are present in low numbers throughout the region, with more localised distributions of chamois, thar, possum and goat. A cause for concern has been the recent release of wild pigs into isolated areas around Lakes Wanaka and Hawea, well outside their previous range.¹⁵ There are low numbers of wallabies in the Mt Burke area. These are under control by DOC. It is the objective of DOC to restrict the southern feral range of thar (as defined by the presence of females) to north and east of the Makarora-Haast highway.



From near Mt Burke:

Above: *Harris Mountains (rear) and Lake Wanaka.*

Right: *West Wanaka country and Harwich Island, Lake Wanaka.*

Photos: Donald Lousley

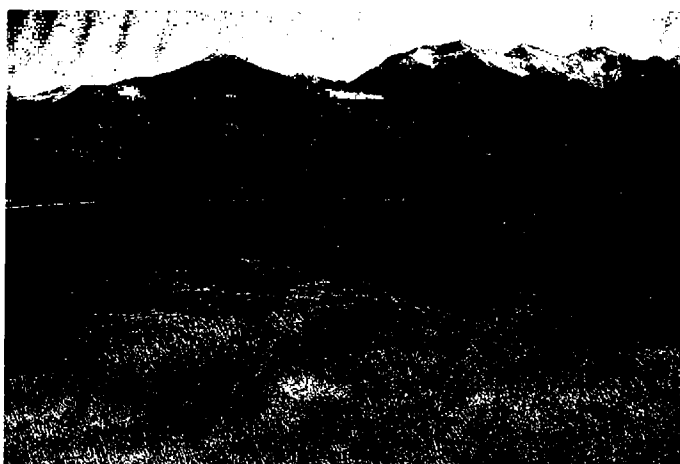
3.2 European Exploration

Nathaniel Chalmers was the first European to visit the region, in 1853, in company with two Maori guides. After reaching Lakes Wanaka and Hawea via the Kawarau and Upper Clutha valleys, Chalmers took ill, abandoning his plans to continue over the Lindis Pass. He departed down the Clutha River on a flax raft.

On his reconnaissance survey of Otago in December 1857, J.T. Thomson obtained the first European view of Mount Aspiring, from Grandview Mountain above Hawea Flat, and produced a sketch map of the Wanaka and Hawea basins. However, it was not until the explorations of James Hector and Julius von Haast in 1863 that the geography of the region was finally unraveled.

3.3 Pastoral History

Pastoral occupation commenced in 1858 when Robert Wilkin established a homestead near the Albertown ford, for a depasturing licence stretching from Lake Wanaka to the Kawarau River.



3. History and Land Use

3.1 Prehistory

Maori occupation of the Wanaka-Hawea basin may have occurred at least 800 years ago, as it is now apparent that the early Maori foraged far and wide through Otago's inland ranges. By the 15th century all species of moa were rare, resulting in a greater dependence on eeling and fowling for seasonal subsistence.¹⁶

The Makarora Valley was a route to the West Coast greenstone, using either Haast Pass or Maori Saddle to cross the main divide.

Tribal conflicts from the early 18th Century onwards strongly influenced late Maori settlement, with only irregular visitation up until the time of European exploration. The Waitaha people abandoned the Wanaka district in approximately 1720, after a bride-searching mission by Te Weka at Parakarehu (Wanaka) turned into a massacre.¹⁷ The last settlement known to exist was until 1836 at The Neck, when a Te Rauparaha raiding party made a surprise attack. Survivors from there and Hawea fled the district.

The lower Matukituki flats and West Wanaka Station were first occupied in 1859. The following year saw occupation of the country between Lakes Wanaka and Hawea and the Makarora Valley.¹⁸ These run boundaries were ill-defined until Surveyor James McKerrow's visit in 1862. Legacies from Government's 1861 'spadeline' boundary between the Otago and Canterbury Provinces remain as the straight boundary between Minaret and Mt Albert Stations, and in the naming of Boundary Creeks in the Makarora and Hunter Valleys.

3.4 Timber and Flax Milling

The lowland forests were soon of interest to the pastoralists as a timber source. The first pit-sawing occurred at the mouth of the Minaret Creek early in 1860, followed by the Makarora Valley. The timber was rafted down Lake Wanaka. Lumber of any description was in great demand after the 1862 Dunstan gold rush, prompting the opening of further small mills at Makarora, Matukituki, Dingle, Timaru River and at Kidds Bush on the shore of Lake Hawea. The first mill with a circular saw was erected at Makarora in 1872.¹⁹ Rafts and whale boats were used in the hazardous transport of the timber down river to Cromwell.

The first large mill to be opened was in 1877 at Mill Creek in the Matukituki, followed by the Makarora and Wilkin Valleys. The main timber trees were red and black beech in the Matukituki, silver beech with some matai, rimu and totara in the Makarora and Wilkin, and a wide variety including kahikatea and

matai around Lake Hawea. By 1905 the timber industry was in decline, with only two major mills operating.²⁰

At Makarora, flax milling replaced timber as the major local industry, continuing with fluctuating fortunes until World War I. The treated fibre was used for rope and twine manufacture in Dunedin.²¹

3.5 Roading

For many years after first European settlement, overland travel remained rather tedious due to the absence of formed tracks. Construction of the first pack track between Hawea and Makarora commenced in 1865. This rough formation was the only alternative to launch travel until 1931, when the first road link was completed after three years of pick and shovel labour. This was the forerunner of today's state highway which linked Makarora to Haast in 1960, and to the rest of Westland in 1965.

3.6 Gold Mining

Although prospectors scoured the ranges looking for payable goldfields, the region was spared the turmoil of the Central Otago gold rushes. The one short-lived exception was in August 1880 when over 300 men rushed to Long Valley in the 'Mt Burke Range.' However by December only 50 men remained, and a year later the gully was deserted. This late episode in Otago's gold rush history was at the time dismissed as a 'new chums' affair.²²

3.7 Land Tenure

The region is predominantly under pastoral lease, with lesser areas of UCL and former state forest (now conservation areas). The only substantial areas of freehold located upvalley from the lakes, are on the Matukituki and Makarora valley floors.

In the 'West Wanaka' district there are four pastoral leases. These butt right up to the Mount Aspiring National Park boundary, including precipitous country in the Corner Burn, as high as Dragonfly Peak (2176 m), and down valley from Kerin Forks in the Wilkin. The balance adjacent to the park is UCL in the upper Albert and Craigie Burns. 11,300 ha of West Wanaka Station has reverted to UCL, and is subject to a Crown land management plan, with areas under grazing permit on the Matukituki faces, the Rumbling and Minaret Burns.²³ Some 12,000 ha in this area has been allocated to the new Department of Conservation (DOC). A recreation permit over 18,000 ha north of the lower Matukituki Valley authorises heliskiing activities.

The beech forests of the lower East Matukituki and the main Matukituki are state forests, as are the substantial Albert Burn and smaller Craigie Burn forests. These were all allocated to DOC. So were 5300 ha of high country in the Albert and Craigie Burn headwaters, to the Mount Aspiring National Park boundary, along the East Matukituki and Wilkin divides.

Two pastoral leases share the **Young and McKerrow Ranges**. Makarora Station occupies the west and upper Hopwood Burn tributary of the Hunter. The fragmented Hunter Valley Station covers the eastern balance of this broken high country and abuts the national park in upper Camerons Creek and along the northern crest of the Young Range. The upper Makarora-Hunter divide and the main divide headwaters of the Hunter are UCL, as are the upper reaches of the Fast Burn and Terrace Creek. 35,000 ha of UCL north of Lake Creek in the Young Range, to the main divide at the head of the Hunter, have been allocated to DOC.

9000 ha of forest in the upper Hunter is former state forest, as are fragmented fingers of forest in several western catchments of Lake Hawea. These have been allocated to DOC. In the Hopwood and Fast Burns, substantial forest remnants were within pastoral lease until recently. 16,000 ha of retired high country, ex Makarora and Hunter Valley Stations and south of Mt Shrimpton, have been allocated to DOC, with the exception of a 835 ha pastoral occupation licence. The only true high country now left under pastoral lease is a central block between Lake Creek and Mt Shrimpton. This is adjacent to the national park and includes the headwaters of Camerons Creek.

There are three small and one larger lake shore recreation reserves containing mountain beech remnants. They are leased for grazing, with public use permitted at all times. Unfortunately, there is an absence of legal access to the large reserve. A 630 ha scenic reserve has been established on the Lake Wanaka face of the McKerrow Range, between Wharf and Camp Creeks. This is both above and below the state highway, and gives protection for broadleaf forest regenerating through bracken fern. It also provides legal access to the Lake Wanaka shoreline.

The 'Mt Burke Range' and The Peninsula is shared by two pastoral leases, containing small pockets of beech forest and larger extents of manuka shrublands.

The western face of the Hunter-Ahuriri divide, north of Mt Barth has been allocated to DOC. This means that the whole of the upper Hunter catchment is now administered as public land.

3.8 Land Use Capability

Most of the higher mountain country has severe limitations to grazing (Class 7), or no primary production capability (Class 8). Only a small portion of the Class 6 lands, which roughly coincide with the bracken fern belt, have been developed through aerial oversowing and topdressing. The Otago Regional Water Board (catchment board) considers that most of the Class 7 and 8 land should either be retired from pastoral use, or have very restricted uses confined to the better localities.²⁴ No retirement plans have been implemented on the Mt Aspiring, Minaret, or Mt Albert Station segments of 'West Wanaka.' However, retirement fencing on Makarora and Hunter Valley stations has destocked most of their extensive high country, but cattle grazing is permitted on some high valley floors.

In 1978 the former Forest Service considered that none of the state forest areas within the region had any timber production potential.²⁵ However in 1983 the Service advocated timber extraction "by the tree" or on a group selection basis within the Matukituki, McKerrow and Hunter State Forests, but confirmed that there was no commercial production potential in the Makarora State Forest.²⁶

The former Mount Aspiring National Park Board proposed two boundary adjustments in its 1981 Management Plan.²⁷ A small area of forest within pastoral lease, immediately down valley from Kerin Forks in the Wilkin is intended for inclusion in the park (now allocated to DOC), and part of the headwaters of the Camerons Creek tributary of the Makarora is proposed for incorporation. Within this latter catchment, the basins and faces above bushline were formerly heavily burnt and grazed. They are presently destocked but remain in Hunter Valley Station. Vigorous recovery of snowgrass and sub-alpine scrub is occurring. The Young Range face in the north branch of Camerons Creek is excluded from the proposed park addition despite the Board's policy that ridge boundaries are preferable to valley bottoms. The

general policy for national parks²⁹ now stipulates that boundaries should encompass complete landscape units and should follow ridgelines in preference to vegetation boundaries.

3.9 District Scheme Zoning

The Lake and Vincent Country Councils have enacted 'Landscape Protection' zones within their district schemes.^{29,30} These encompass much of the region. The lake faces along both shores of Lake Wanaka, the western Hawea lake face, the 'Mt Burke Range' and the eastern Makarora face up to the national park boundary are included in these zones. (Refer to Section 4.1 for discussion of adverse landscape impacts, and of the adequacy of district scheme provisions).

4. Recreational Opportunities

The Wanaka and Hawea basins have long been a recreational attraction of considerable regional importance. The two lakes, plus the Haast highway connection, are the focus for most activity. The surrounding mountains provide a high-relief setting which is only used, in a passive sense, by a large majority of visitors. Most are content to view from lake, shore, highway, or holiday settlement. The maintenance of an attractive landscape setting, plus opportunities to participate in a diverse range of recreational activities, is probably the major reason for the attractiveness of the region.

The main passive and active recreational activities are:

4.1 Landscape Viewing

This is the primary passive activity. Naturally any discordant elements in the landscape detract from the visitor experience. The more obvious detractors are (insensitively sited and designed) earthworks, usually associated with farming. The majority of these effects are a direct consequence of high country roading/farm tracking. Other impacts have occurred with communications installations such as the Little Mt Maude television repeater and its switch-back road which is highly visible from Hawea Flat.

Fortunately, most Wanaka lake faces remain free from farm track scars, and to a lesser extent, so too are the Hawea faces. A dual approach by the Crown (as landlord) and catchment board over the siting, design and vegetative restoration of farm tracks is required. Alternative methods of high country fence construction need to be seriously considered, to avoid use of the bulldozer.

The West Wanaka Crown Land Management Plan³¹ proposes action to prevent activities that are likely to adversely affect scenic values. Yet previously the Department of Lands and Survey financed access tracking up to 1460 m, along the greater length of the lower Matukituki faces. The plan belatedly acknowledged that "the area is an impressive landscape feature which is visible from many vantage points and localities of periodic high population densities." Natural revegetation has now covered most of the scars, however for several years these were visible to all visitors passing through the lower Matukituki Valley.

The importance of retaining landscapes with an absence of obvious development has been nominally recognised by the two territorial local authorities which share the region. Unfortunately, their 'Landscape Protection' zones do not differentiate high impact farming practices from farming in general. Therefore there is no means of controlling the practices which are

currently causing the greatest visual impacts (farm access roading, benched fence lines). The Lake County Council permits buildings and other structures accessory to any predominant or conditional use, with controls on siting, design and effect on vegetation. Vincent County has only general controls over "detraction from the scenic amenities of the landscape." Forestry is not a permitted use in Lake County, but is a conditional use in Vincent. An assessment of landscape character and of existing and potential land use impacts is required, leading to adequate and compatible code of ordinance provisions between Counties. The Lake County Council has stated its intention of roading half the western shore of Lake Wanaka, as farm access to Minaret Station. Financial allocations for construction were (unsuccessfully) sought, without first addressing the requirements for landscape protection.

4.2 Shoreline and River Activities

Unavailability of access to shorelines, both physical and legal, is a major deterrent to public use.

4.2.1 Lake Hawea and Hunter River. The down valley half of Lake Hawea has road access around its shores but without legal rights of use due to the absence of Section 58 strips. The original strips were obliterated when lake level controls commenced in 1958 and were not reinstated around the new, higher shoreline.

Picnicking and informal camping is provided for at only two localities. Timaru Creek and Kidds Bush are becoming increasingly popular as a contrast to the high density and facility orientated camping grounds in the holiday centres. As already noted, the shoreline recreation reserves at Hunter Valley Station, being the only land reserved for public use around the lake, are legally inaccessible except by boat. This is also the only legal means for fishers, trampers and hunters to reach the Section 58 strips that do exist up either bank of the Hunter River. The availability of the extensive Crown land river bed for public access and use is in jeopardy due to a proposal to issue a Licence to Occupy for grazing purposes, which includes trespass rights for the occupier/runholder.

4.2.2 Lake Wanaka. Most of this natural shoreline is unroaded, excepting the south and north-east shores. Section 58 strips are laid off around its entirety. Localised overland access restrictions or prohibitions apply near Wanaka and Dublin Bay due to the absence of, or ill-defined legal accesses from public roads. This requires urgent resolution due to the seasonally heavy public demand for such access.

4.2.3 Canoeing. Below Kerin Forks, the Wilkin provides conditions much like the lower Matukituki River, but is steeper with slightly harder rapids, not exceeding Grade 2. Absence of convenient access to the headwaters results in infrequent canoeing activity.³²

The Matukituki River from the East Branch confluence to Lake Wanaka, is popular for canoeing and is used regularly by school groups. Rapids on this easy, braided river do not exceed Grade 1+.³³ The lower Makarora River provides similar canoeing conditions with a setting of forested mountain scenery.

The New Zealand Recreational River Survey ranks the recreational values of the Matukituki, Makarora and Wilkin as high, having moderate to exceptional recreational and scenic values. The Hunter River is ranked as of intermediate value.³⁴

4.2.4 Fishing. All major rivers are important recreational fisheries, supporting brown and rainbow trout, and salmon. (The Makarora and Matukituki rivers are commented on in the Mount Aspiring National Park chapter). As a result of a survey the Hunter River has been ranked as nationally important as a 'wilderness' fishery.³⁵ This is due to anglers judging the river as having "outstanding scenic beauty, extensive areas of fishable water, high catch rates, and low levels of use." The fishing experience is considered exceptional. Main concerns for anglers are speeding jet boats and difficulty of access. The river is doubly important as a key spawning and rearing area for the Lake Hawea fishery. This is due to the lake's catchment being cut off from the rest of the Clutha catchment by the Hawea dam.³⁶

4.3 Tramping and Climbing

The whole region is admirably suitable for recreational walking, with a wide range of difficulty and duration. There is a 'diversity of adversity' in both climate and topography. This ranges between the extremes of semi-arid, moderate relief uplands with few topographic barriers to foot travel, to precipitous, alpine and semi-remote terrain with ever present hazards of river and weather. Climatic transition can be dramatic, even within a few km, with increasing severity towards the main divide.

4.3.1 Short Walks. There are only two walks within the region which have been specifically developed for general public use. An interesting 600 m climb through mountain beech leads from Kidds Bush to the open tops above the Sawyer Burn tributary of Lake Hawea. Excellent views of the lake and Dingle Burn country are obtained. An off-shoot track from the Makarora Bush Nature Walk climbs 1300 m through predominantly silver beech forest to alpine grasslands on the slopes of Mt Shrimpton. Both tracks are used for DOC guided interpretative walks.

There is scope to extend public walking opportunities near Wanaka and Hawea, where the demand is greatest. On Lake Wanaka's shoreline there is a need for extension of walking access between Dublin Bay and Stevensons Arm by walkway status if existing legal access is insufficient. Walkway formation to prominent viewpoints could do much to satisfy the requirements of summer holiday visitors. Mt Maude (1315 m) is an obvious viewpoint for Hawea residents. A walkway route from Dublin Bay over Mts Gold and Burke (1400 m) descending via the gold workings in Long Valley, would traverse a variety of interesting terrain, with a centrally placed viewpoint of the whole region on route. There is little point to further shoreline walkways, either due to nearby roading or an absence of obvious destinations.

The remaining high country is better suited for tramping use, with unformed access through the more developed lower flanks. Easements over pastoral leasehold land should be provided as required.

4.3.2 'West Wanaka.' This area is well suited to through tramping trips, of three or more days duration, with a wide variety of routes. The Minaret and Albert Burns provide the main easterly approaches, with a low saddle between them. Several branches of the Albert Burn provide saddle access to the East Matukituki and Wilkin Valleys. Hester Pinney Creek and the Albert Burn Saddle provide the main western approach.

The upper reaches of the easterly draining catchments are particularly attractive for tramping, with the forested Albert Burn

and the smaller Craigie Burn not unlike adjacent valleys within the national park. Access easements up the main valleys from West Wanaka homestead and the Makarora are required.

The precipitous Corner Burn is rarely visited by trampers due to the Matukituki River cutting off access. Most of the smaller valleys, without useful access out of their heads, receive negligible attention. Most upper catchments are now destocked. Lower to middle reaches are generally stocked and contain musterers' huts. Permission to use these should be sought.

Overall there is considerable potential for tramping, concentrating on the main valleys. However, due to shorter and better known access to the adjacent national park with its more alpine scenery, this potential is unlikely to be realised. However these lightly visited valleys provide contrasting solitude to the, at times, populous Matukituki and Wilkin Valleys.

Only the peaks bordering the national park receive regular climbing attention. These are almost exclusively approached from the west. Dragonfly Peak, Mts Aspinall, Lois, Twilight and Jumbo are regularly ascended, being mainly easy snow climbs. The Minaret Peaks, Mt Alta and other peaks centrally located in this district are infrequently climbed. This pattern is unlikely to change.

Suspension bridge, upper Hunter River.





West Hunter Valley below Wilson Pass. Mt Huxley centre.

Photo: Ken Mason

4.3.3 Young and McKerrow Ranges. For similar reasons to those applying to the 'West Wanaka' mountains, with the exception of Makarora tributaries, this area tends to be overlooked in comparison to adjacent portions of the national park. Lack of car access beyond Hunter Valley homestead and uncertainty of obtaining consent for either 4WD or foot access to the eastern approaches to the range, are major factors discouraging public use.

These mountains are ideally suited for energetic weekend crossings, with over ten Lake Hawea and lower Hunter River tributaries providing routes into either Boundary or Camerons Creek, or to the Makarora via the crest of the McKerrow Range.

Most of the partly-forested catchments between the Sawyer Burn and Scrubby Flat Creek have stock tracks to their upper reaches, and contain former Forest Service or musterers' huts. There is generally uncomplicated tramping to the valley heads, often with steep climbs on to passes or ridge crests. A notable exception is a very low pass between Camerons Creek and the High Burn. The latter, and Scrubby Flat Creek Pass, are the usual crossing points into the Makarora catchment.

The northern Young Range is usually approached from Camerons Creek and the upper Makarora. Both these have spectacular gorges traversed by well defined tracks leading to national park huts.

Many first ascents of the area's rocky high-points probably occurred soon after pastoral occupation, but the musterers concerned left few records. Surveyor T.N. Brodrick and party in

1881 were the first to systematically ascend peaks on the McKerrow Range to establish trig stations. This range provides mainly easy rock scrambles, however some aspects like the Camerons Creek and High Burn faces of Mt Shrimpton (1996 m), present some spectacular climbing challenges.

4.3.4 Upper Hunter Valley. The prospect of 50 km of 4WD track and river flat walking between the public road-end and the Hunter Forks, is usually enough to deter most trampers and climbers from using a Hunter Valley approach. However the alpine terrain in the upper valley is particularly attractive for a visit, or as part of main divide crossings into the Wills and Landsborough, or to the Huxley.

The Wills Valley provides the usual access, with Wilson Pass providing a steep snowgrass route into the west branch of the Hunter. This pass was used by gold prospectors as early as 1869. Less direct routes from the Wills are available via Long Flat Saddle or Wills Pass. The Upper and Lower Studholme Passes provide less useful crossings from the lower Landsborough.

The south shoulder and north face of Mt Strauchon provide high-level routes to the east branch of the Hunter via the North Huxley and Brodrick Pass. Other, more difficult alpine crossings have been pioneered between these valleys.

Both branches have track access from the Hunter Forks through beech forest to DOC huts.

Despite the presence of unclimbed main divide peaks, the head of the Hunter was largely ignored by climbers until the

1930s. Although the area had long been familiar to deerstalkers, who may have made many unrecorded ascents, the first concerted alpine exploration did not occur until 1934 in which year most major peaks were first climbed. Mt Strauchon (2315 m) being the most prominent of the Hunter Peaks, received earlier attention, with its first ascent claimed in 1908 via the Landsborough. However the first confirmed ascent was not until 1934, this time from the Hunter. The climbing in this area is characterised by short snow climbs of varying difficulty.

The lack of attention this area receives is in marked contrast to the periodic clutter and congestion common to the adjacent Makarora and Hopkins Valleys. This characteristic should become increasingly valuable, providing a diversity of recreational opportunities within alpine Otago. Relative remoteness should persist while foot access from Hawea remains long and tiresome. Jet boats and 4WD vehicles provide means of reducing access time, however these are not readily available or convenient when through trips are planned. It is surprising that the alternatives of shorter and more interesting access to the Hunter peaks via the Wills and North Huxley valleys are so infrequently used.

4.4 Hunting

Red deer were first liberated in 1871 near Morven Hills in the Lindis Valley, and within thirty years their range had expanded to include the Hunter, Makarora and Haast valleys. It was the Hunter and Makarora that saw the early prominence of the Otago red deer herd, and the first trophy hunting in 1885. Thereafter many wealthy sporting gentlemen were attracted from overseas.

Until 1889 hunting was controlled by consents for individual shoots, and such control procedures resulted in only limited numbers being shot. Rapid increases in deer numbers and declining food supply resulted in a declining standard of trophy head. The Otago Acclimatisation Society attempted to improve the stock by fresh liberations, but to little effect. The Society introduced bounties in 1906, and then its own shooters in 1908 in an attempt to cull out old hinds and malformed stags. Protection for red deer was partially lifted in 1923 when the Society realised that "nothing short of partial extermination will be of any avail."³⁷ To encourage this, in 1926 Government introduced bounties for tails and in 1930 lifted protection for all deer in New Zealand. The Department of Internal Affairs commenced its own culling programme as the value of skins and heads, being the only commercial value of deer at that time, was insufficient incentive for private control.

In 1956, responsibility for Government control measures passed to the Forest Service. The legacy of huts and tracks in the Hunter and Young Range date from this period and continue to be maintained largely to encourage deer control by recreational hunters. However, it was not until the growth of the game meat industry in the 1960s that there was a heavy toll on animal populations. Jet boats, fixed wing aircraft, and then helicopters were used in a lucrative export business, with the result that deer numbers are now moderate to low overall.

Chamois ranged south from liberations at Mt Cook and are present in low numbers. They are also present on the Hunter tops. To prevent their spread southwards into the Mount Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks, extermination was the prime animal control objective for the former Forest Service.³⁸ This policy is being continued by DOC.

Feral goats are present in small numbers on West Wanaka Station.

Up until the present, the main recreational activity in the region has been deerstalking, despite declining populations of game animals. In recent years, a safari operator took shooting parties into the Minaret Burn, but this has ceased. Unless animal numbers reverse their downward trend participation in recreational hunting will continue to decline, relative to other forms of recreation.

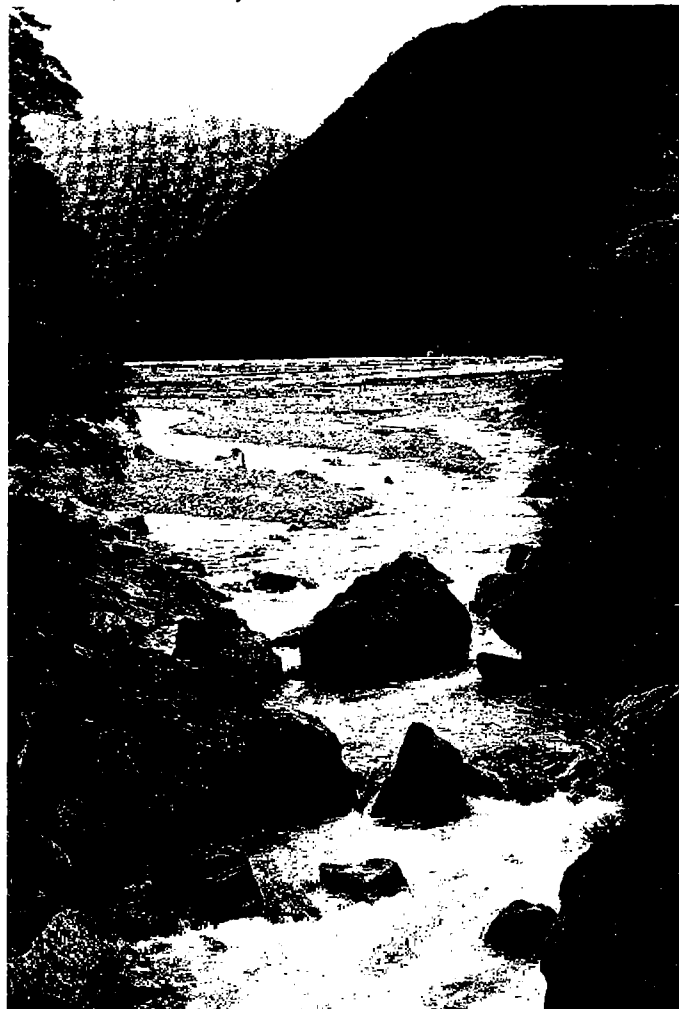
In 1915 the head of Lake Hawea was the site of the first release of Canada geese in Otago.³⁹ Their numbers increased to such an extent that in the 1930s, visiting climbers recorded 'plague' numbers on the Hunter flats.

4.5 Skiing

Historically, there has been very little skiing within these mountains. Although it is technically possible in many areas to use skis as an aid to winter mountaineering, there are no records of this occurring. Length of foot access and a general lack of extensive slopes of suitable gradient, mitigate against ski mountaineering.

Since 1978 heliskiing has occurred on West Wanaka Station, in conjunction with operations in the northern Harris Mountains. Southerly aspects on Buchanan Peak, Triple Peak and Mt Alta are utilised, dependent on snow stability and daily weather conditions. Helicopter ferry-time from pick-up bases along the Matukituki Valley Road is the major restraint on more extensive activity. It is realised that the more distant headwaters of the Albert, Minaret and Estuary Burns provide significant potential for heliskiing.⁴⁰

Forbes Flat, Hunter Valley.



The Young and McKerrow Ranges are generally too dissected and steep for alpine skiing, with the possible exception of the Boundary Creek headwaters. Southerly aspects on Mt Constitution (1996 m) may have potential for heliskiing or even skifield development. The need for further skifields in the greater Southern Lakes region is a separate matter for debate.

The gentler relief along the 'Mt Burke Range' tops, has limited potential for cross country skiing, but in relation to the Central Otago ranges, this is of low significance.

4.6 Commercial Recreation.

Almost all the Hunter, McKerrow Range, Dingle, and former Hawea, Matukituki, and Makarora state forests currently have multiple applications for aircraft based tourist concessions. Activities applied for include hunting, fishing, and 'helihiking.'

5. Zoning

5.1 Natural Experience

With the exception of the 'Mt Burke Range,' most of the region is zoned 'natural experience.' All high altitude lands and regenerating shrub and forest at lower elevations are included.

Long-term pastoral occupation needs to be discontinued within this zone, although grazing could continue on the most favourable sites (e.g. valley floors) by means of short term tenancies which do not conflict with protection of natural values and allows recreational use. The zone is almost entirely rugged Class 7 and 8 country with negligible productive potential foregone.

5.2 Open Space

Most of the lower lake faces and the 'Mt Burke Range' is zoned 'open space.' It is within this zone that the most modification, through a long history of grazing and burning, has occurred. Farm tracking is also most prevalent, especially on the Mt Burke country where the higher crests are affected.

There are natural areas within the zone which require definition and protection in their own right, but these are generally very localised and of limited (active) recreational value. The major exception are lake shores which are of very high value.

Sensitive landscape treatment is required throughout the zone to ensure maintenance of the scenic qualities for which the whole region is renowned.

6. Recommendations

6.1 To provide more appropriate boundaries, the following additions be made to the Mount Aspiring National Park:

- pastoral lease and former state forest west of Corner Burn-East Matukituki divide;
- Wilkin addition as proposed in Mount Aspiring National Park management plan;⁴¹
- Camerons Creek headwaters with boundary along Makarora-Hunter divide.

6.2 Where practicable exclude stock from all former state forest areas.

6.3 All leasehold within the natural experience zone be removed from pastoral leases and retained in direct Crown ownership and control.

6.4 Grazing within the natural experience zone be allowed by permit only, and limited to sites most suitable for pastoral use, provided conservation values are not jeopardised.

6.5 Kidds Bush Recreation Reserve be reclassified 'scenic' and stock excluded.

6.6 Grazing rights over forested sections of Lake Hawea's shoreline recreation reserves be cancelled and stock excluded.

6.7 The Vincent and Lake County Councils make provision in their respective landscape protection zones for control of visually detrimental farming practices such as roading and farm tracking.

6.8 The Crown exercise close control of earth disturbance (tracking, cultivation, drainage) on pastoral leases, with prohibition within the natural experience zone.

6.9 The serious deficiencies in public access and use rights around Lake Hawea be rectified by:

- establishing Crown Land strips around all shores with legal access provided from legal formed roads;

Mt Strauchon from East Hunter-North Huxley crossing.



- providing convenient legal access to all recreation reserves;
- providing public vehicle and foot access to the upper Hunter Valley by legal definition or Crown contribution to the maintenance of the existing 4WD track on Hunter Valley Station;
- retaining Hunter river bed as Crown land, with no grazing-occupation rights issued, to maintain public use rights and protect high wildlife values.

Note: The first opportunities to exclude 'Section 58 strips' will be at pastoral lease renewals in June 1989 and in 1991.

6.10 Provide practical public foot easements across pastoral lease to conservation lands within the natural experience zone.

6.11 Establish walkways:

- from Dublin Bay to Mts Gold and Burke, to Long Valley and State Highway 6 (route standard only);
- up Mt Maude from Hawea township (walk standard).

6.12 Provide more informal camping areas around Lakes Hawea and Wanaka.

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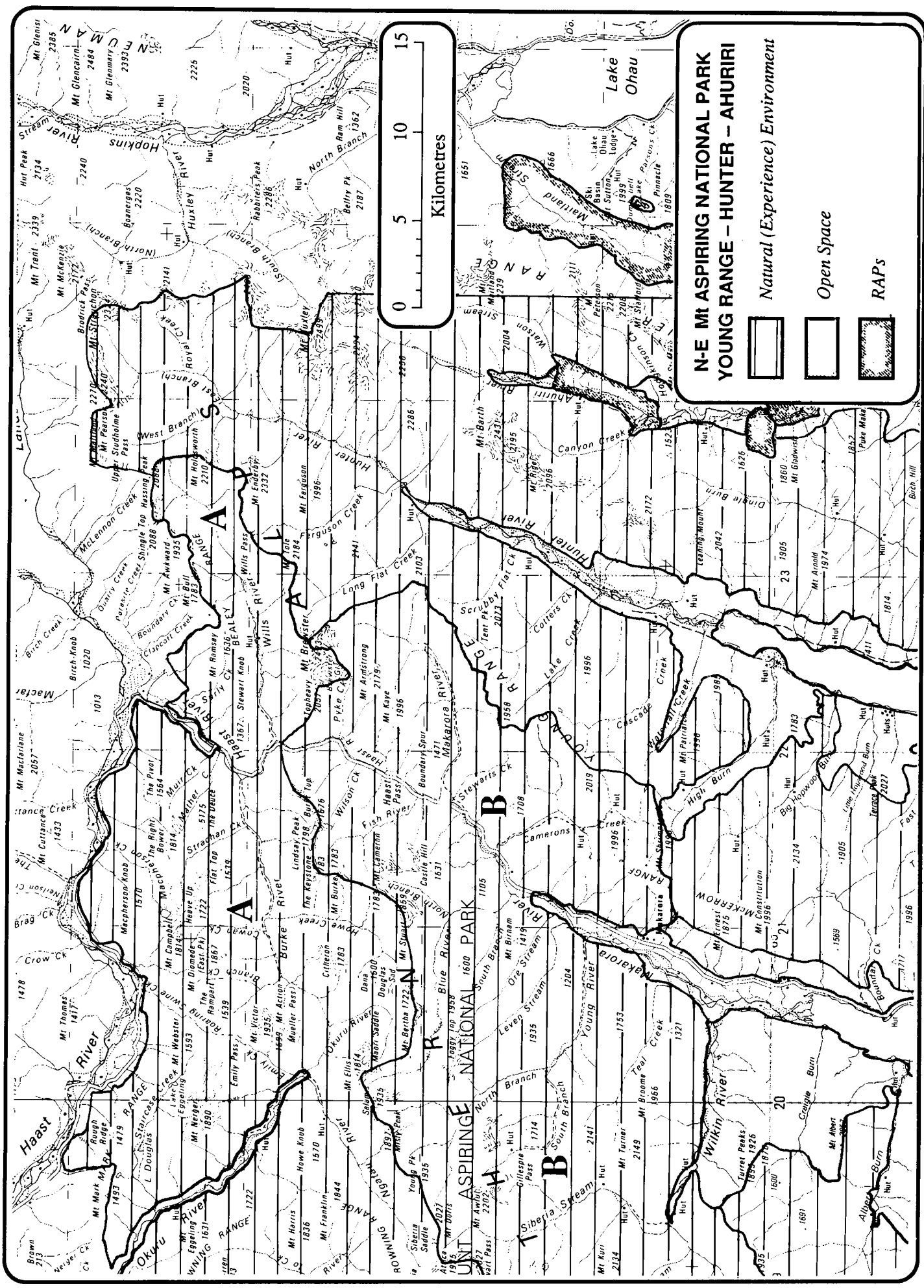
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**N-E Mt ASPIRING NATIONAL PARK
YOUNG RANGE – HUNTER – AHURI**

Natural (Experience) Environment

Open Space

RAPS

