

Surrounding ranges

The next morning dawned with clear blue skies and a view of the surrounding ranges. A heavy mist soon rolled in and forced a number of keas down from the sky and into the nearby bush.

Our friendly pipit and a pair of welcome swallows were there to see us on our way to McKay Hut. This 5-hour tramp was certainly the most diverse of the trip, and we later agreed it would have been interesting to explore more of this vast tussock country.

We had thunder and lightning as we crossed from the edge of the downs into the more comforting West Coast rain forest. The promise of rain was soon fulfilled, and we spent a couple of hours weathering a heavy rainstorm.

A steady climb led us through rocky clearings and stunted bush, grey warblers and yellow-breasted tits keeping us company. It was not long before the familiar "tink" of the fernbird was heard. This interesting little bird allowed us to watch him for some time.

The appearance of a warm sun led to an enjoyable final half-hour walk to McKay Hut. Brown creepers seemed to appreciate this change in the weather and soon burst forth with their distinctive chatter.

The view from the hut to the coast was certainly memorable. Though we had hoped to record a sunset on film, the local weka population caught our attention.

Abundant fauna

On the long walk from McKay down to Lewis Hut and along to the Heaphy River mouth rain was ever present, but on this stretch fauna was the most abundant.

The lush forest (including rimu, rata, kamahi, beech,

and tree ferns) on this descent was considered some of the best native forest we had seen. The robin's staccato-like call was soon heard above the rain, the bird needing little encouragement to investigate our presence.

During the walk along the river flats towards the mouth of the Heaphy River thrushes and blackbirds often flitted away from our feet. New Zealand native pigeons were frequently heard above the nikau-lined track, which closely followed the dark brown Heaphy. The presence of southern black-backed gulls, a pair of black swans, and both white-throated and pied shags

indicated to us that the coast was not far away.

With the roar of the surf and the sight of the fast-ebbing tide we eventually came to the picturesque setting of the Heaphy Hut.

Relaxing over yet another "brew", we were jolted out of our rest by the startled cry of a weka and a fleeting glimpse of the largest white hen we had ever seen. A walk down to the edge of the Tasman Sea soon led to a view of an Australasian harrier soaring high above the lupins. Mallards, grey ducks, and welcome swallows could be seen in the raupo swamp a few minutes south of the hut.



Above: A *Paryphanta* snail. The shell is about 5 cm in diameter.

Right: A section of the track alongside the Heaphy River.

Below: A South Island robin, one of the many bird species observed on the trip.

