

to us natural and cultural influences in the high country. He elaborated on this topic later that evening.

With the kind permission of Castle Hill Station runholder, Max Smith, we explored the limestone landscape of the Castle Hill Nature Reserve accompanied by Society Distinguished Life Member, Lance McCaskill. Within the 6.4 hectare fenced area grow the entire world population of the Castle Hill buttercup, *Ranunculus paucifolius*. It is now thriving, thanks both to reserve protection since 1954 and to weed control and the propagation of young plants. It was a momentous occasion for our group to be shown these special plants by their guardian, Lance McCaskill.

Lunch amidst the beech forests of Craigieburn Forest Park gave us a chance to discuss erosion and re-forestation programmes with Forest Service scientist, Alan Nordmeyer. Forest Service is responsible for high country wild animal control. They have identified some half million hectares of high country which they consider might benefit from artificial revegetation. Landscape architect, Dianne Lucas, later described the landscape changes that might result from large scale exotic plantings. Mindful also of the North Island Contorta Pine disaster, council members expressed caution about any large scale high country pine planting. From Craigieburn we crossed into the Rakaia catchment, and botanized the grasslands and shrublands of the Acheron Gorge. 69 native plant species were found including flowering *Ranunculus*, snowberries, *Corokia*, bluebells and aniseed.

Rapid agricultural development is evident throughout the Rakaia high country with cultivation of the flatter country and oversowing and topdressing of the more extensive steepplands. This highlights the urgency of securing some examples of native high country vegetation, particularly at lower altitudes, before it all disappears.

The Rakaia river was in high flood after two weeks of nor-west rain. Rod Hay described the birdlife of the river and his ordeals when camping in the Rakaia riverbed.

Council meeting

This year the Council meeting was brief. The executive reported on Society activities over the last six months. Rod Hay reported on his recent field work in the South Pacific. Environmental Defence Society lawyer, Kevin Williams, discussed their work on Canterbury river conservation and wetlands. Conservation officer, Ann Bell, outlined our draft wetland policy. This was adopted by Council with branch comments to be forwarded to Head Office by 31 March 1984.

High country seminar

This three hour seminar was to familiarize councillors with some of the natural and recreational values of the high country. Professor Alan Mark described the distinctive plant communities throughout our tussock grasslands. His message was clear. Scientific arguments must be backed with widespread public support if reservation proposals are to succeed.

Dianne Lucas, who originates from Bendigo Station in Central Otago, shared

Distinguished Life Member Lance McCaskill in his natural environment — Castle Hill Nature Reserve.

Photograph: A. F. Mark.

Lance McCaskill tenderly handling the Castle Hill Buttercups as he describes how weeding is essential for the survival of the species.

Photograph: R. Hay.

