

Government persistence

With all the real arguments for indigenous logging gone (timber supply, economic and employment) the operation could today seem pointless. Why are Government persisting with it so stubbornly?

The first reason is probably the most human and least rational of all: government inertia, unwilling to concede anything more to those troublesome and persistent campaign people condescendingly labelled 'greenies'. A year ago the counter conservation movement looked like rearing its head in some force. But New Zealand Futures has already fallen back. Sustained by its expensive lawyers and public relations men, there were two things it couldn't manage to buy; the research and campaigning flair, and the sacrificial support so freely given to the conservation movement.

Second, Whirinaki has its immense and — it now seems — improvident forest roading system put in over 20 years, and still increasing. Having built it, the pressures are to get some return from it by logging. Forest Service have been reluctant to talk about roading. Asked under the Official Information Act about its length and cost, the Conservator of Forests at Rotorua claimed they had no detailed roading map, and that the information we required would take three man days at a cost to us of \$460! We obtained much of what we wanted the same day by a phone call to the Minister for the Environment, who had just had it passed across by the Forest Service!

This showed 350km of logging roads in total: the distance from Christchurch to Dunedin, or Wellington to New Plymouth. 50 more km are envisaged and this year's vote contains \$20,000 for a further 2 kilometres and \$15,000 for road maintenance.

Last, there is probably one reason for logging, not — in itself — disreputable. This is the pride of professional foresters in a craft of management that there is not

much scope left for. Whirinaki — they believe — could provide experience in indigenous management, even though other managed forests have tended to blow down. However understandable, their aspiration is today uneconomic, and would be a continuing threat to Whirinaki forest. It would be sustained yield management not for a forest or an economy, but to sustain forest managers!

To cherish and preserve

Whirinaki Forest has only to be seen, in its density and diversity, its grandeur and uniqueness, to realise how much better it could be used. As soon as all logging stops, the other great options can come up for discussion. The foremost could be tourism: from biological education to experience of wilderness: or just to walk through the forest to sense its wonder and glory.

This is one of the special places where — set against our long exploitative past — claims for multiple use will no longer stand up. Our mission here must be to cherish and preserve.

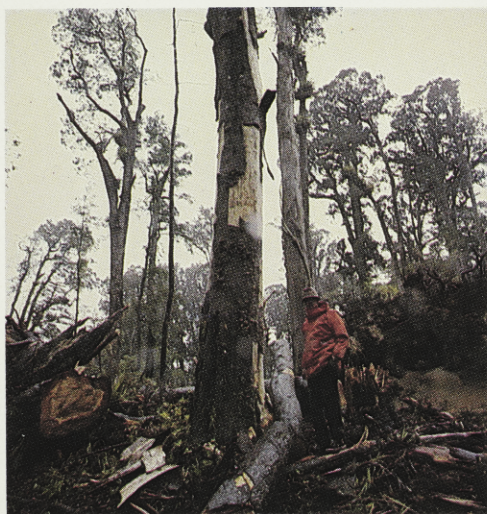
The political means exist to do so. Our North Island State-owned indigenous forests could be saved by administrative fiat this month: with the economic and social consequences hardly noticed.

But — finally — what a strange economic procedure we have been accustomed to apply to such fine forests over the years. All social and non-marketable values are assessed — it would seem — at zero; and until it can be shown that preservation involves no economic cost (in jobs, timber or exports), it will be resisted!

Yet the social value of Whirinaki is high, increasing, even if not calculable, so long as public appreciation grows, and our virgin podocarp forests continue to shrink.

By this measure, the future will judge our actions on Whirinaki; and they will take a poor view of our 'Economics', in going on mutilating it, so thoughtlessly and so long.

Later this year the book *To save a forest — Whirinaki* will be published. It contains outstanding photographs of Whirinaki forest and a lively and detailed text by John Morton.



John Morton surveying the double tragedy that befell a dense podocarp stand. First selectively logged, then vulnerable and exposed, destroyed by the Easter storm of 1982.

A remnant stand of dense totara on the edge of the now clear felled Mangawiri basin.

