



IMPRESSIONS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS SYSTEM IN CHILE

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Approaching the small Chilean township of San Pedro (3,233m — centre of picture) on the western flank of the Andes at latitude 22°N. Desert with scattered shrubs in the foreground merges into desert grassland on the lower slopes of the volcanic cone of Cerro Inacaliri (5,626m).

A seven-month refresher leave from the University of Otago was sufficient to cover the full growing season in the interior of Alaska, as well as two months in South America where, in the southern regions, there are some striking similarities with the landscape, vegetation and flora of New Zealand.

Anyone concerned with the need for reservation of an adequately representative range of indigenous ecosystems could not fail to be impressed with the achievements in both Alaska and Chile (unfortunately I cannot comment on Argentina as, along with other New Zealanders, I was classed as *persona-non-gratia* and denied entry).

Legislation as recent as 1980 (Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act) added very substantially to federal reservations in Alaska where 13 National Parks and Reserves now occupy 13.6% of this huge state (1,524,671km²) while 16 National Wildlife Reserves account for another 20.3% of the state's area. These two categories together, provide an area almost twice the size of New Zealand that has been set aside by statute for its national heritage values. But that is another story and one that has received considerable publicity to date in conservation circles.

Chile's National Parks

More surprising to me was the large number and extent of national parks in the Republic of Chile which generally has received scant publicity here. Not only is the number and total area of national parks in Chile most impressive but the degree to which they represent the natural landscapes and ecological diversity of the

country provides, I believe, an important lesson for us in New Zealand by highlighting probably the major deficiency in the national park and reserve system.

A country about three times the population, the area (756,946km² vs 269,060km²), and the length of New Zealand, Chile extends from tropical

Table 1
Number of Chilean National Parks in nine size categories.

Note: information on only 45 of the 48 parks is available. Values for the ten New Zealand National Parks are given for comparison.

Area (ha)	<100	<1,000	<5,000	<10,000	<50,000	<100,000	<500,000	<1,000,000	>1,000,000
Chile	5	5	6	5	12	2	5	3	2
N.Z.	0	0	0	0	2	4	3	0	1