

Tongariro National Park hosted New Zealand's first summer nature programme in 1962. Although limited in length and scope, its success provided the momentum for other national parks to follow suit.

By the early 1970s, nearly all of New Zealand's national parks were running summer nature programmes. Over the next decade, the increasing popularity of parks and reserves led to new developments. The growing recognition of the importance of historical and cultural resources lent a new sense of balance to interpretation. The special needs of children were recognised, and separate activities with a conservation theme were introduced for them. The inauguration of summer nature programmes in many scenic, historic and recreation reserves extended the range of opportunities available to the public.

A recent development brings the wheel full circle — summer nature programmes are moving into the cities. North Head Historic Reserve and

*"I suppose that nature interpretation explained in its simplest terms is this: It is opening the eyes of people; it is sharpening the noses of people; it is tuning the ears of people; it is sensitising the touch of people."*

When the Canadian interpreter Yorke Edwards wrote these words, he was referring not only to an *aim* of interpretation, but its principal *means*. To be in the presence of an object in its natural context, and to explore it with all of the senses, gives the object a reality that mere words cannot convey. The symbols of words and pictures are constant intermediaries between ourselves and the real word — in interpretation they are used as adjuncts to the experience and not as a substitute for it. The medium is definitely *not* the message.

The Chinese have a saying to the effect that "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand." It would serve as a motto for interpretation. Interpretation is *doing*, not talking. How are these principles



Summer programmes are moving near cities. Here people attend a programme at Onawe Peninsula near Akaroa.

Photo: Lands and Survey



"I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand." This Chinese maxim is applied to good effect in the Otago Goldfields Park, where gold panning is demonstrated and practised.

Photo: Mark Hanger



The human need for national parks and reserves is undeniable. On a field trip through Fiordland National Park, trampers come across the scented Easter Orchid (*Earina autumnalis*).

Photo: Dave Wakelin

Rangitoto Island last year offered a range of activities to Aucklanders. Quail Island Recreation Reserve and Akaroa Reserves ran programmes within easy reach of the people of Christchurch. People in Dunedin were able to take part in a number of guided visits ranging from the Taieri wetlands to the Moeraki Boulders, and Gabriel's Gully to the Maungatua mountains. This year, a summer programme will be based on the Wellington Reserves. So, 21 summers after those first experimental steps at Tongariro, interpretation has come of age in New Zealand.

### Doing, not talking

Is interpretation another name for nature education? No, it is not.

applied in our national park and reserve summer nature programmes? In a word, diversely.

Guided walks to the Crater Lake on Mt Ruapehu every summer regularly attract well over a hundred people aged from 5 to 75. In the Arthur's Pass National Park visitor centre, an audiovisual on the history of transport over the Pass is given a sense of immediacy by the presence of a Cobb & Co stage coach. People may sit on the coach during the viewing. Visitors to Mount Cook National Park participate in Search and Rescue demonstrations.

Cave exploration is part of the programme at Waitomo. At Golden Point in the Otago Goldfields Park a gold

stamping battery is still in operation. Shoreline fossicks at low tide in many coastal areas reveal the fascinating adaptations of life-forms where land and sea meet.

### The search for nature

For the youngsters, the delights of both adventure and contemplation are catered for. In the Taranaki Reserves programme, children waded up a creek lined by muddy banks and dense bush, clambering over logjams and slippery boulders, in search of the "Captain Capel" goldmine. Young visitors to Fiordland National Park go into the bush to look for evidence of animals that cannot be seen — tracks, birdsong, droppings, nests and other signs are sought. And if human litter is not considered in this joyful search then the ever present interpreter can point out that this too is the sign of an absent (or absent minded) animal.

Not only are different environments visited and explored, but the special charm of particular times of day is rediscovered in most areas. Sunrise at Lake Matheson in Westland National Park is a popular drawcard. An interpreter at Abel Tasman National Park limits group size for nocturnal glow-worm walks. The low numbers invite a more contemplative mood, as participants focus their senses on the special world of the forest by night. A twilight walk at Tirohanga in the