

Plants have adapted to the exposed alpine environment, with cushion forms common. Mountain daisy, *Celmisia sessiliflora*, Old Man Range.

Photo: Brian Enting.

Although traditional extensive sheep country, increasing numbers of cattle and agricultural intensification are changing the high country and modifying natural values. Romney-Merino cross wethers, Nokomai Station, Garvie Range.

Photo: Liz Brook.



country. This group, represented by the Invermay and Tara Hills research stations of MAF and the Grasslands Division of DSIR have been able to commit large research budgets to, in effect, eliminate tussock grasslands. In sharp contrast, the Protected Natural Areas programme operates on a financial shoestring.

- ☐ Forest Service research which has changed much of its emphasis recently from protection forestry to promoting the establishment of exotic production forests in the high country.
- ☐ the failure of the former National Water and Soil Conservation Authority to require the surrender from a pastoral lease of erosion-prone land retired from grazing. [Millions of taxpayer dollars were made available to pastoral lessees for alternative land development to compensate them for this steeppland retirement.]
- ☐ the dearth of information on the scientific and recreation values of this pastoral high country.

### The growth in public interest in the high country:

However, today we have cause for greater optimism regarding the eventual



reservation of significant large areas of tussockland. The following reasons show why:

- ☐ greater public awareness of the values of open space in the high country, especially by active groups that are not so well catered for in our national and forest parks — canoeists, fishermen, horse-trekkers, 4-wheel drive parties.
- ☐ strong public interest in the protection of wild and scenic rivers.
- ☐ the momentum building up in support of the DSIR Protected Natural Areas programme and the good work of the National Parks and Reserves Authority in continually promoting the need for a system of reserves *fully representative* of our natural landscapes and biota.
- ☐ growing recognition that nature-oriented tourism can help conservation.
- ☐ increasing co-operation between public interest groups including Forest and Bird, Federated Mountain Clubs, NZ Deerstalkers Association and the Acclimatisation Societies who have joined together to press for the protection of natural and recreationally important areas before there is any further freeholding of pastoral lease land.
- ☐ the traditional sympathies of the Labour Party towards retaining high country as public lands. Labour's 1984 election policy stated that they would only allow the freeholding of pastoral lease land once there was "comprehensive protection of soil and water values, recreational and environmental values". They also promised to restructure the Land Settlement Board to ensure representation of recreational, scientific and conservation interests. Since taking office they have moved quickly to invite Professor Alan Mark and former Federated Mountain Clubs' President Alan Evans to sit on the LSB. They also have invited similar representation on regional Land Settlement Committees.

### Priorities for tussockland reserves:

Some of the best opportunities for scientific reserves of low altitude tussocklands have now been lost. A landmark case was the Nardoo block of Waipori in eastern Otago outlined in detail by Professor Alan Mark in the November 1980 issue of *Forest & Bird*.

Here, the LSB successfully opposed the inclusion of low altitude snow tussock grasslands in the Nardoo reserve.

By contrast, reservation of the magnificent red tussock grasslands of Gorge Hill in Southland has been approved in principle by the LSB. Perhaps the tide is now turning. Visitors to the Fiordland National Park or the Mavora Lakes will now approach the forests and mountains on a scenic highway surrounded by red tussocks swaying in the wind.

The Protected Natural Area programme survey teams have begun to work through the high country identifying sites of special scientific interest and opportunities for representative reserves.

As well as reserves which protect some of the special scientific features of the high country, there are tussock landscapes which are worthy of particular recognition because they are landmarks which loom large in New Zealander's consciousness. In an earlier article (*Forest & Bird*, February 1982) one of us (LFM) suggested a number of possible candidates for National Reserve status — Old Man Range, Lindis Pass, and the Remarkables.

Other areas are clearly also suited as National Reserves to complete this list. If conservation, recreation and landscape values of the high country are to be preserved in the long term a range of protective mechanisms are needed including:

- ☐ strict *scientific* reserves, not necessarily large, to protect important examples of flora and fauna, soils or