



The virgin terrace forests of the proposed Atbara-Nile reserve, viewed over recent logging operations in the foreground. At the centre right, a small finger of pines has nudged its way into the native forest. At the rear, the Paparoas are shrouded in cloud.

Photo: Guy Salmon

yet been achieved in Buller. The Foulwind district is a sad mosaic of plundered landscapes, with only three meagre scenic reserves. The proposed Atbara-Nile reserve spills across into the Foulwind district and would add to it a magnificent virgin example of an otherwise lost ecology.

To the south, the Punakaiki ecological district encompasses the Tiropahi reserve, which includes three high marine terraces. Unfortunately these were logged and cleared many years ago. The nearby Atbara-Nile proposal would complete the terrace sequence, and would do so far better — by providing virgin forested examples of the distinctive landforms.

The Ngakawau — grandeur and variety

The forests growing over the mountains and plateau of the Ngakawau ecological district are stunning, both for their grandeur and their variety. To the east is the high Glasgow Range, stepping down to a broad plateau, the slopes of which fall away to the sea and to the Buller River. The dramatic cleavage of the Ngakawau Gorge splits the plateau in two, as the Ngakawau River has cut through coal measures and siltstone to the ancient bed beneath. Behind this plateau, the Ngakawau catchment opens out into a huge basin, draining streams flowing off the Glasgow and William Ranges.

High on the range tops grow natural scrublands and grasslands — communities which appear again on cold swampy areas of the plateau under the mountains' shadows.

Tall podocarp-beech forests grow in the amphitheatre of the Ngakawau's basin, standing on the narrow steps of rich river terraces. Although cut away during the same glacial times that formed the Atbara-Nile terraces, these differ as they are about 400 metres above the ocean and were unaffected by the erasing powers of a rising sea level. The older terraces are worn by leaching and erosion, with the highest a rare natural pakihi wetland.

Closer to the coast, wind-swept coal measures support a stunted and strange vegetation. Plants that grow here are especially adapted to survive in the toxins of coal-rich soil. The measures reach to the rim of the Ngakawau gorge cliffs, then stop. In the cool shelter of the river cleft grow a remarkable assortment of extremely rare plants, ferns, forest herbs and shrubs. Among these is *Celmisia morganii*, a mountain daisy now known only from the Ngakawau River.

Giant carnivorous snails, *Powelliphanta*, populate the leaf litter on the plateau floor, and in the forest canopy live many bird species — kaka, parakeets, kiwis, robins.

Urgent plea for protection

In response to requests from conservationists and Government agencies responsible for conservation, the Forest Service has proposed two reserves — the Ngakawau and Orikaka ecological areas, which preserve some features but not the important tall forests of the Ngakawau basin, nor the continuum to the Glasgow tops or the coastal forest fringe.

In 1976 the Scientific Co-ordinating Committee proposed to protect the whole of the Ngakawau forest and its inland basin forests, but this was later greatly reduced because of Government pressure to release rimu sawlogs for the dilapidated Waimangaroa sawmill. Today, the grand forests of the Ngakawau basin are still untouched, but much of the northern plateau is being clearfelled, burnt and planted in pines. *Survey pegs are in the ground for a proposed logging road that would thrust right into the heart of the proposed reserve. The Joint Campaign on Native Forests is fighting hard against the logging road.*

The original proposal should go ahead, and extend to the tops of the Glasgow Range, thus linking the Ngakawau ecological area to the Orikaka, and providing the large forest tract asked for by the Wildlife Service. To the north, a separate circle of forest should be set aside to protect a *Powelliphanta* population, while an outlier reserve near the summit of Mt Augustus would protect the unique plants growing there.

For visitors, the area divides into two. The lower Ngakawau Gorge, featuring the beautiful Mangatini waterfall and the historic remains of an old coal mine railway, is readily accessible for family groups via the Charming Creek railway. The upper catchment, on the other hand, with its deep gorge, basin forests, river flats and Glasgow Range peaks, is more remote and challenging.

At present, the lower gorge is controlled by Lands and Survey and the rest of the catchment by Forest Service. If the upper catchment can be reserved, there is merit in the Forest Service controlling the whole area.

And what about jobs in the timber industry? Guy Salmon pointed the way to rationalisation of the Buller industry in the August 1982 issue of *Forest and Bird*. He argued that more jobs should be created in wood processing as opposed to cutting down trees; tourist development and making effective use of already cleared land were also preferred options. The timber industry could also make use of hard beech trees currently wasted in rimu logging.

Further reading: copies of the two scientific reports on these reserve proposals are available for \$5 each from the Joint Campaign on Native Forests, PO Box 756, Nelson.