



Trumans Pack, near Punakaiki. Constant pounding of the Tasman Sea has created marvellous sculptures in the coastal limestone.

Photo: Craig Potton

Few places could compete for intensity of greenness with little Welsh Creek, off the Fox River.

Photo: Derek Shaw



Mt Mendel, looking north from Mt Faraday. Climber Les Molloy has remarked that the Paparoa Range probably offers a challenge to the alpine traveller unsurpassed in any other range of equivalent height (including the Tararua Range) outside Fiordland.

Photo: Andy Dennis



The West Coast has a history of exploitation of natural resources for distant markets with little left to show for it but mining tailings, pakihi swamp and cutover forest. An important issue now for this region, and many others in New Zealand, is whether there is more economic benefit to be gained by leaving the native forest that remains rather than chopping it down and sending it away.

At a recent meeting of the West Coast United Council, Budyong Hill of the Buller Conservation Group gave the councillors a different type of argument for establishing a Punakaiki National Park than they are used to hearing from a West Coaster. He argued: "The Henshall report on New Zealand tourism concluded that 71 percent of overseas visitors aimed to visit a National Park and that 78 percent actually did visit one. The Punakaiki proposal is an opportunity for the West Coast, and in particular Buller, to get a bit more of a slice of the cake".

Making an area into a national park has a profound effect on how much it is used for recreation. Whereas a Forest Recreation Survey in 1981 found that many people are uncertain of their right to enter state forest land, national parks are widely known for being open to everyone and designed to encourage recreation. The result is that the name "national park" has associations for New Zealanders and

many overseas visitors which make it the best advertisement a natural area can have.

West Coast holidays at present often involve long periods of driving between a few fairly predictable stops. A large part of the reason for this seems to be ignorance of the available attractions.

Bruce Knight, a ranger at Punakaiki, estimated that about 80 percent of the people who end up spending some time at Punakaiki have discovered the area's attractions by accident. After pausing in their day's travel to look at the Pancake Rocks, they would notice a photo in a display or ask a question and realise that there was a lot more to be seen.

With large numbers of people already travelling the Coast Road through Punakaiki — but not stopping for long — the key to the economic benefit of tourism is whether they can be encouraged to lengthen their stay around Punakaiki. This is where the publicity value of national park status is important.

Once developed, a park would have heaps to offer. Andy Dennis, author of *The Paparoas Guide*, has described the potential for seven short nature walks, 14 walking tracks close to the main highway and two major tramping tracks in and around the proposed park area. In addition he notes the caving, exploring, hunting and water sport potential. With services like a na-

tional park centre and the high publicity that national park status automatically affords an area, a large increase in visitors could be expected.

In practice, the *main* economic effect of extra visitors comes from *extra nights* spent in an area because accommodation and meals are the main travel costs. An economic study of the Punakaiki National Park proposal (Stephens and Wells, 1983) estimated that a park would lead to at least a 10 percent increase in accommodation demand in the Westport to Greymouth area. Even a small increase like this, when added to the extra Lands and Survey jobs that would be required, was found to promise some 60 new full-time and part-time jobs in the region. On top of this, the study predicted extra economic activity in the area flowing from the work of park establishment and maintenance.

According to ranger staff at Punakaiki the predictions in this study are already being confirmed. Private entrepreneurs in the area are apparently confident enough that a national park will be established, that a motor camp is under construction at Charleston. County Council approval has been sought and gained for new motels at Punakaiki and land for other commercial operations is under investigation. Visitor interest in the area at present is thought to be fairly constant or only increasing slowly. But the expectation is that with the