

PALMER'S ROAD

farewell to a scenic gem

by Gerry McSweeney, National Conservation Officer

The mountains, valleys and beech forests around Springs Junction, near Lewis Pass, are a scenic gem and a key tourist area. However, rising beech chip prices threaten much of this Upper Grey-Marua Valley area with clearance. The Nelson chipmill, which has already devastated privately owned native forest near Nelson, is now ranging further afield. Extensive areas of the Victoria State Forest Park are zoned for logging in the draft management plan shortly to be made public. Much of the privately owned forest in the Maruia Valley is signed up for chipping or has already gone. Now even legal road reserves have been devastated because the Greymouth County Council succumbed to the chipmill's temptations.

Until last December, Palmers Road wound beneath huge red beech trees for 15 kilometres from near Springs Junction into the Upper Grey River to a small farm called Newcombes. The beech forests on both sides of the road are protected within the Lewis Pass National Reserve and the Victoria Forest Park, but the chain-wide road reserve is legally controlled by Greymouth County Council.

Shattered stumps mark an orgy of forest destruction

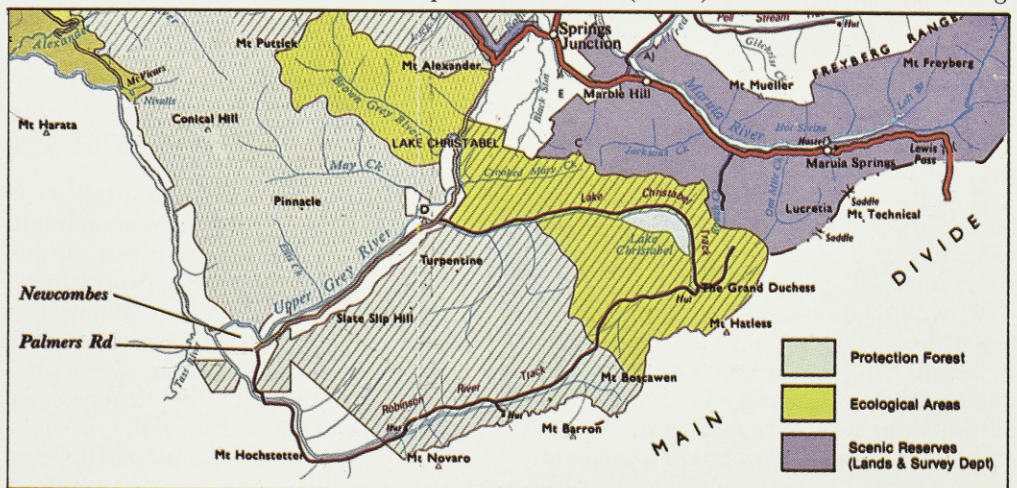
Today shattered stumps, a churned up road and a 30-metre wide swathe of destruction are all that remains of what was widely regarded as New Zealand's finest beech forest drive. The Nelson chipmill has claimed another scenic victim. Over Christmas, the Greymouth County Council sold off all the trees within the road reserve, mostly to the chipmill, for about \$3.50 a tonne. A few of the finest red beech were sawn up for

bridge decking for County roads — a low grade of red beech for which treated radiata pine is usually preferred.

Grey County's action is quite legal, but it is morally indefensible. Most other local authorities would regard scenic roads like Palmers as an asset to be treasured and preserved — not hocked off to the highest bidder.

Subsidised by the New Zealand taxpayer

The supreme irony is that not only will Greymouth County receive timber revenue from their logging operation, but to restore the road from its pounding by logging trucks, Greymouth County will be aided by a special taxpayer grant of \$60,000 from the National Roads Boards (NRB) Back Blocks Roading



Fund. And this is at a time when the "Beautiful New Zealand" scheme is attempting elsewhere to restore trees and shrubs to enhance the scenic beauty of our roadsides. The Back Blocks Fund is a legacy from a bygone pioneering age. Today pushing roads into wilderness makes no economic or environmental sense and the fund should be scrapped.

Coasters unite to protest vandalism

"As the direct descendent of the very first settlers in Buller and Westland, the Newcombe brothers, and as a daughter of the man who lived in and loved this area, I cannot stand by without protest and watch this senseless destruction of a once beautiful environment" pleaded Norma Streeter (nee Newcombe) of Lake Kaniere, Westland in her 22 February

Today chipmilling has cleared a 20-30 metre wide swathe through the forest in an orgy of taxpayer-subsidised destruction.

Photo: Gerry McSweeney