



Devastating clearance on steep land which even feral goats struggle to climb. Such areas should have been left alone.

These strongly regenerating shrublands and forest have been destroyed by the crusher (top centre) since this photo was taken. The area was earmarked for reserve in 1978.

Photos: Terry Fitzgibbon

The Society wants clearance halted and a reduction in the number of units proposed, although the farming lobby may not welcome this because of the money recently spent. However, it is surely better to scale down now than later, when even more could be wasted on an economically dubious scheme.

Aotuhia's regenerating shrublands have now reached an interesting and critical stage in the cycle towards mature canopy forest. Much of the manuka-kanuka shrubland is now dying off and is being replaced by tree ferns and hardwood species. Since these areas are at least one third of the way towards becoming varied mature forest, their reservation is even more essential.

Clarkson (1981)⁴ notes that the presence of tree ferns in steepland gullies very often indicates poor drainage or slip-sites with thin, depleted or low fertility soils. Research underway by Paul Blaschke near Aotuhia confirms that hill country development in these sensitive areas is unlikely to be an economic or ecological success. Their work lends weight to the earlier land capability survey of the Ministry of Works (1975) which calls for the retirement of steepland reverted areas and development of only 2,400 hectares of the area.⁵

Aotuhia's shrublands act as "biological corridors" between the mature forests of the Wanganui and Poarangitautahi blocks. These corridors need to be retained and allowed to regenerate. These shrublands are the home of a large number of kiwis. Any further clearance would destroy many of these ground-dwelling birds and numerous other species. No investigation has yet been carried out of habitats, plants or animal species within the areas proposed for crushing and burning.

Uncommon birds

Peter Winter, the Society's Taranaki branch chairman, reports that there is a kokako colony near the Round Hill area in the easternmost portion of the block. Kaka, parakeet, morepork, robin, pied tit, fantail, grey warbler, pigeon, bellbird, whitehead, silvereye, tui and

both shining and long tailed cuckoo, have been sighted both in and around the bush surroundings.³ Blue duck have been sighted on one of the as yet unreserved tarns at the head of the Porangi Stream. Both the sighting and the tarns are uncommon in this area.

The Society has asked the Department to initiate a Protected Natural Area survey of these lands in the event of development proceeding. We have also asked the Land Settlement Board to adopt the new definitions of native forest recently adopted by the Forest Service which includes "locally important vegetation for wildlife habitat" and "areas of native vegetation of any height including manuka-kanuka containing regenerating high forest species". These definitions should also assist in determining which areas require preservation.

Reserves should be established before any further development. This would ensure such lands would later be covenanted or excluded from settlement titles. In addition, Lands and Survey and the Forest Service should be tackling the immense problem of goat, possum and wild cattle browsing more vigorously.

Aotuhia's finger-like valleys are generally mist-shrouded and rain-soaked through the winter months. The bulldozer-crusher is presently poised at the top of a steep shrubland hill awaiting the dryer spring-summer months. It should be rendered immobile by sound decision-making.

FOOTNOTES

1. Department of Internal Affairs, *Settlers and Pioneers* (1940), Wgtn p 81.
2. Report of Special Committee, *Deterioration of Crown Lands* (1925). Appendix to Journals of House of Reps., C. 15 draws attention to excessive clearance and continuing high costs of curbing reversion, etc.
3. Lands and Survey and Forest Service, *Aotuhia Regional Land Use Study* (1978), convenors: Fitzgibbon, T. and Armitage, I. Wgtn. p 64, 68, 90 and Maps #4, #6, and #304.
4. Clarkson, B. *Vegetation Studies in the Taranaki Land District* (1981) unpub D.Phil., Uni of Waikato, Hamilton. p 278-85. See also (3) above, p. 19, 37 and 40.
5. M.W.D., *Land Use Capability Assessment: Aotuhia* (1975), Water and Soil Division, Palmerston North. Survey and farm block area not dissimilar.

