



Kevin Smith, Society West Coast Conservation Officer, calls for

A fair deal for the forests of Abut Head

On a map of the South Island, the small bump halfway down the West Coast marks Abut Head — a densely forested headland which juts defiantly out into the breakers of the Tasman Sea. A well-known landmark to West Coast fishermen, it lies just to the north of the Okarito Lagoon and the Waitangiroto River white heron colony.

The five kilometre-long headland is surrounded by imposing physical barriers which have so far ensured its protection. Flanking Abut Head are the rampaging waters of the Whataroa River, a wild coastline, the beautiful Saltwater Lagoon and the hidden waterways and dense podocarp forests of Saltwater State Forest.

Today, however, logging roads are fast closing in on Abut Head, threatening its 580 hectares of privately-owned

forests of rimu and kahikatea. Behind the scenes, conservation groups have been appealing for many years to the Forest Service and Lands and Survey to safeguard this important area. Compensation to the owners by way of an exchange of timber or land or by direct cash payment would be required. Fitful negotiations on these aspects have been unsuccessful. Acting on legal advice, the Forest Service recently notified the sawmiller, Derek Banks of Christchurch, that he was entitled to road access through Saltwater State Forest. This road will be bulldozed along the banks of the Whataroa River through virgin forest zoned for addition to the Saltwater Ecological Area.

In response, the West Coast branch of Forest and Bird and Christchurch NFAC are together spearheading a

public campaign to protect Abut Head. West Coast author and Society councillor, Peter Hooper, describes Abut Head as “one of the most important stretches of privately-owned unspoilt coastline in New Zealand”.

Historic event

It is ironic that Abut Head should be the scene of controversy today, for 125 years ago the area was the setting for the most significant event in West Coast history.

In the autumn of 1860 at a small Maori village or kainga on the edge of the Saltwater (Poerua) Lagoon, the Crown Land Agent, James MacKay, successfully negotiated with the three principal Poutini Kai Tahu chiefs — Tae Tae, Tarapuhi te Kaukihi and Werita Tainui — for the purchase of the