

Cook, Westland, Aspiring and Fiordland), the Okarito Lagoon and adjacent Waitangiroto Nature Reserve (breeding place of the white heron). It would also take in the Crown lands of the Hooker-Landsborough, Red Hills and Hump Ridge (Waitutu), protected state forests of southern South Westland, and the Olivine, Pyke and Waitutu State Forest of Southland. No private, Maori or leased Crown lands would be included.

The overwhelming bulk of this area is already set aside for protection. However, decisions on the future management of the South Westland state forests, which contain the nation's last extensive kahikatea forests, await Forest Service proposals due out next year.

Logging may be promoted, but even so the predominant uses will assuredly be for tourism, recreation and nature conservation.

Nomination in two stages

The World Heritage proposal would proceed in two stages: the national parks and other protected areas first (to coincide with the 1987 Centennial). These would be joined later by South Westland state forest areas zoned for conservation after the expiry of the 1990 moratorium and the Red Hills Crown Lands. Significantly, the entire area need not become a national park. World Heritage status is conferred regardless of tenure. The only requirement is that there must be laws or policies providing for preservation of



The large Fiordland crested penguin nests along forested coastlines from Okarito in the north to Waitutu and Stewart Island.

Photo: Wildlife Service.

such areas.

Once gazetted, the reputation of a World Heritage site on an international level soars. As the successful alliance between conservation and tourism has shown, the two interests need not clash, but in fact can be of mutual benefit.

The wonders of the south-west

South-west New Zealand is a region of superlatives, as generations of scientists, tourists and residents have testified. Few areas of the world have such a concentration of natural scenic splendour within a comparatively small space.

"Natural properties" must meet four main criteria for World Heritage Site listing: they must be outstanding examples of the major stages of the world's evolutionary history; outstanding examples of ongoing biological evolution, geological processes and man's interaction with the natural environment; contain rare and unique areas of exceptional natural beauty; and finally, be habitats where rare or endangered animals and plants survive.

On all four counts south-west New Zealand qualifies effortlessly as a World Heritage site.

Geological and biological evolution

South-west New Zealand contains the most extensive and spectacular natural lands remaining in New Zealand. When linked with southern South America and western Tasmania, the area provides a classic example of lands originating from the break up of the super-continent Gondwanaland, 60 million years ago.

● The area encompasses a substantial portion of the Alpine Fault, junction of the Indian and Pacific Continental Plates. It contains representative examples of all the sedimentary and

metamorphic rocks of New Zealand found on either side of the Alpine Fault.

● New Zealand's mountain building epoch that commenced in the Late Pliocene era and continues to the present is dramatically illustrated within the proposal area which contains New Zealand's highest and most spectacular mountain ranges.

● The Waitutu forest contain a time sequence of 13 marine terraces that date from progressive uplift of the south coast of New Zealand.

● The whole south-west area provides the finest Australasian example of the Pleistocene glaciations that continue to the present day. It includes the extensively glaciated hard rock of Fiordland, most of New Zealand's remaining glaciers and a full range of glacial deposits. It also contains a wide range of post-glacial deposits; parallel sand dunes and the forested alluvial surfaces of southern South Westland.

● The examples of plant succession after glaciation found within the area are internationally recognised. This includes the full suite of soil surfaces from the most youthful post-glacial surfaces through mature forests to the old infertile soils supporting natural low shrubland vegetation.

● The southern South Westland beech-podocarp ecotone is the only complete unmodified example of this process of forest readjustment after glaciation in New Zealand. As such this ecotone is internationally recognised. The ecotone near Greymouth

at the northern end of the beech "gap" has been severely modified by forest clearance.

● The area contains the finest and only complete altitudinal zonation encompassing virtually the full range of forest communities of southern New Zealand — from kahikatea swamp forest to bushline [elsewhere in New Zealand the kahikatea and alluvial forest components of this sequence have been cleared].

● The area contains the most extensive remaining natural freshwater wetlands and estuarine systems in New Zealand. Of particular note is the Okarito lagoon-Waitangiroto complex, Meyer, Kini, Mataketake and Hermitage Swamps.

● The area contains the most extensive lowland native forests remaining in New Zealand. Of particular note are the extensive areas of kahikatea forest in southern South Westland, the beech/podocarp forests of this region and of Hollyford/Waitutu and red beech forests of the Dart Valley.

Exceptional natural beauty

From Okarito to Waitutu, one can gain scenic vistas of unsurpassed beauty, taking in sea, forest and mountain.

The Mt Cook/Westland region includes the country's highest peaks and largest glaciers. Lower but no less spectacular mountains and wide beech forested valleys are found in the Landsborough/Aspiring area. The ultramafic (high in levels of

magnesium and iron containing minerals) rocks of the Red Hills and the ultramafic moraine of the Cascade plateau are a unique feature.

Further south the massive crags of Fiordland, split by vast glaciated fiords, make an outstanding scenic feature, contrasting with the lowland landscape and coastline of Waitutu.

Rare plants and animals

South-west New Zealand is largely the only home of these birds: the Okarito brown kiwi, South Island brown kiwi, takahe, Fiordland crested penguin and yellowhead.

Outstanding populations of other birds whose habitats have been elsewhere dramatically reduced also occur here: kaka, kakariki, blue duck, southern crested grebe.

Many unique, distinctive and nationally important plants and plant associations occur in the region. In the whole of New Zealand, dense kahikatea stands have been reduced to 2 percent of their former extent — the coastal lowlands of southern South Westland are the tree's last stronghold.

Natural dunelands are a "forgotten habitat" well represented in the area. These are dominated by the vulnerable plant pingao.

The Poison Bay-Transit area of Fiordland contains some of the last native forest on mainland New Zealand virtually unaffected by possums and deer.