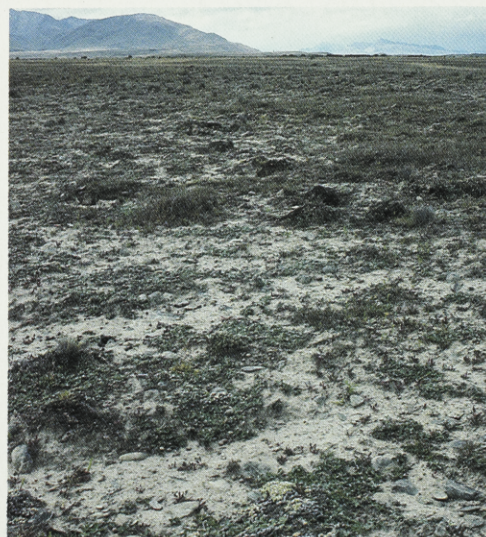




Raupo lagoon and the Ben Ohau Range — a priority natural area on Ohau Downs pastoral lease. Photo: Gerry McSweeney

Basin. They were always accompanied by the runholder on the properties they visited.

Despite earlier fears, what emerged during the week was an understanding and acceptance of the value of representative reserves. "I get a little less concerned as time goes by that we high country people have as much to worry about from the PNA programme as we first thought," commented Arthur Scaife.



Short tussock is threatened not just by cultivation and topdressing but also by rabbits and *Hieracium* flatweed which have devastated this tussock area. Photo: Gerry McSweeney

Even farmers' fears allayed

Farmers' fears were allayed by the realisation that for many of the PNAs, what was required was not a high fence and a "keep out" notice. Rather the protected short tussock grassland would need to be extensively grazed. Although dominated by native plants, these grasslands have expanded because of human fires and animal grazing. This would need to continue to perpetuate the tussocks and prevent the eruption of introduced grasses and *Hieracium*. Although controlled extensive grazing would be required in the PNA areas, management agreements for such areas would have to preclude oversowing, cultivation and other development. Such activities are not a legal right of a pastoral lessee, rather they are a privilege for which the lessee must make specific application.

This in part explains the willingness of Lands and Survey Deputy Director-General George Macmillan to bite the bullet on the runholders' question whether lessees will be compensated when PNAs are established.

"I accept without question, and so does the Land Settlement Board, that if a lessee is being asked to forgo some development opportunity that he is automatically entitled to undertake, he is entitled to compensation". He also emphasised that in general establishment of PNAs could only be by negotiation.

As the runholders thawed to the concept of representative reserves, equally dramatic was the growing realisation amongst the scientists of PASAC of the impact of rabbits and weeds on the Mackenzie Basin.

At the beginning of the week runhold-

ers' spokesman Michael Murchison had assured PASACs first public meeting that, "Runholders are conservationists and generally accept that these are natural areas that may need protection."

With virtually no reserves through the high country today and wetlands and tussockland eliminated over wide areas by pasture improvement programmes, the public could be justifiably sceptical about Michael Murchison's statement. However during the week in the Mackenzie it became increasingly clear that if runholders understood the purpose of the PNA programme they were willing to co-operate in establishing representative reserves.

"Fescue tussock has always been a special feature of Ben Ohau station — especially on the block beside the main road. We're keen for it to be left for the future", says Simon Cameron, who with his wife Priscilla and his parents, farms the station near Twizel.

Short tussock on river gravels was once the most extensive vegetation type in the Mackenzie. However today it has disappeared from most of the basin through pasture improvement, hydro development and roads. The PNA survey team identified a 300 hectare short tussock area on Simon Cameron's property. It is a spectacular example of short tussock, native broom and native herbs. When the PASAC team inspected the area it was alive with tussockland animals — tiger beetles, short horned grasshoppers, lizards, banded dotterel and pipit.

NZ's finest short tussock area

If Ben Ohau's tussock is to be maintained and *Hieracium* and introduced grasses kept