

in check, extensive grazing by merino sheep must continue. On the adjacent Twizel airstrip where grazing is excluded, introduced browntop grass and *Hieracium* have swamped the short tussocks. Simon Cameron has very generously suggested that the PNA area could be expanded to include the whole short tussock covered paddock — some 1,500 hectares. This would undoubtedly be the finest protected short tussock area in the whole country and negotiations have now commenced to protect it through a covenant. This will allow for controlled grazing but preclude destruction of the short tussock by cultivation and oversowing, although the dry and stony land is clearly unsuited for such pasture improvement anyway. In exchange, the Government will clearly have to show its commitment to rabbit control in the short tussock reserve.

Just as a partnership is needed to create representative reserves, another partnership is needed to tackle the rabbit problem. Myxomatosis introduction is not considered by a 1985 Environmental Impact Report to be the answer. There are problems in its effectiveness and speed of control, wide public opposition to its use, possible negative effects on our trading image and possible infection of domestic rabbits. Greater state assistance with rabbit poisoning in critical areas is one alternative. Another suggestion has been the commercialisation of the wild rabbit. Clearly the rabbit issue is a problem for all New Zealanders, not just high country runholders.



The devastating impact of rabbits on a Ben Ohau Station fence post. From left to right Simon Cameron (runholder, Ben Ohau), Professor Kevin O'Connor (PASAC), Laurie Kenworthy (Commissioner of Crown Lands, Canterbury) and Arthur Scaife (Land Settlement Board).

Simon and Priscilla Cameron are not alone in wanting to protect the natural character of the high country as part of their farming operation. Further south, Don and Mary Lou Blue farm Ohau Downs Station. As well as fertile cultivated flats, this pastoral lease includes spectacular tussock and shrub covered glacial moraines studded with small lakes and wetlands.

"We've been careful to look after the lakes and the tussock on the moraines — they make Ohau Downs special," Don Blue told me recently. "However they also provide one of our few stock watering areas so stock must have access to them."

About 500 hectares of moraines and lakes on the Blue's pastoral lease were identified by the PNA survey as deserving protection. Unfortunately the PASAC team did not have time to visit the area in February.

The type of negotiations described above are not going to be possible everywhere. Not all runholders will necessarily be as sympathetic. Nor will the scientists always be so flexible. There are tall tussock, shrubland and wetland associations where grazing must be excluded if the plants are to have a long term future.

Attitudes will not change overnight. It will take time for runholders to recognise that the public interest in their leasehold lands need not be a threat. Rather it can be used as an ally against both rapacious rabbits and a Land Development Corporation greedy to maximise its rental income. Equally difficult for nature conservationists will be accepting that preserving some types of tussocklands may require continued grazing.

The key to successful achievement of PNAs is clearly mutual understanding.

Runholders, officials and nature conservationists all seem agreed on one thing — the momentum now behind the Mackenzie programme must not be now lost. 🦅



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