

Opposite: The Samoan lifestyle is closely linked to the forest, and is seriously affected if the forest is removed. The *fale* (house) is constructed of selected poumuli poles (*Securinega samoensis*) and coconut. The canoes, used for lagoon fishing, are made from specially durable *fau* (*Pariti tiliaceus*)

Photo: Guy Salmon

Below right: Logs stacked awaiting export at a jetty at Asau in Western Samoa. This is a scene that is becoming more and more common on islands throughout the Pacific.

Photo: Guy Salmon

Below: Log exporters ransacking the tropical forests leave behind the lower section of the trunk with its big plank buttresses.

Photo: Guy Salmon



services, most of which have a high imported component. To pay the import bill, governments are increasingly resorting to forest exploitation and the export — not only of timber — but also of vast quantities of unprocessed logs.

### Dereliction and resentment

In the Solomon Islands, giant companies like Unilever hop from one island to the next, stripping off all the logs as they go, leaving dereliction and resentment behind. Log exporting has recently spread to Fiji and Samoa while woodchipping as well is expanding in Papua New Guinea. These developments have gravely shortened the lifetime of the South Pacific's potentially merchantable lowland native forests. In the most serious cases — such as Western Samoa — almost all will be gone in 10–12 years.

While the plight of the Pacific forests appears grim, the conservation of tropical forests in the world as a whole amounts to an immense and desperate problem. These tropical forests are a world heritage of profound importance. They are an incredibly rich storehouse of plant and animal species compared to temperate forests like ours. Their protective influence on land, water, food and genetic resources and on climate is vital to the future of hundreds of millions of people. Their progressive destruction by multinational timber companies and by the land-clearing activities of poverty-stricken rural peoples — often displaced, landless, and nearly hopeless — is a contemporary planetary disaster. The degradation and clearance of this great forest resource has reached such colossal momentum now that one can say with certainty that it is the ability and will of enlightened people to act within the next decade that will determine what if anything survives.

For us in New Zealand, the problem may seem unmanageably large. Nonetheless there is a contribution we can make to conservation in the area nearest to us — the South Pacific. This is an area with strong biological links to our own nature heritage — as anyone quickly appreciates on seeing the variety of recognizeably familiar plants in the forests, from the ferns and orchids up to the giant Pacific species of the podocarp and kauri families. These Pacific forests are close to us, and increasingly readily visited; and it is our own accelerating demand for their decorative timbers that is contributing markedly to the destruction of these forests.

Our official overseas aid programme is

imminent loss of timber resources but also about water supplies, recreation, the hunting of *lupe* (pigeon) and the long term welfare of the whole community. In the Solomon Islands, where village residents have ransacked a logging camp and bitterly opposed logging, efforts are being organized to bring other village leaders who are considering log export deals on their own islands into contact with those island communities which have already experienced the results of logging. In Samoa, the alternative concept of "village parks" promoted by Iosefatu Reti in an accompanying article needs funding for a demonstration park. And Fiji has an established National Trust which promotes con-



assisting reforestation in several Pacific countries — taking over obligations which the exploiting timber companies invariably neglect. Unfortunately, our replanting role also eases the conscience of some island decision-makers as they authorise increased native forest exploitation.

The replanting is almost entirely in exotic trees, and aimed very largely at industrial rather than village use. Environmental assessment of the aid programme remains vestigial and there are grounds for concern about some of the projects. Little is being done to help define watershed protection forests, permanent nature reserves or national parks. To some extent, the aid programme is limited by the fact that it depends on requests from recipient governments.

### Conservation groups come in

That is where non-governmental conservation groups can come in: to seed and support the establishment of conservation groups in Pacific countries, and to work with concerned local people to build awareness of the need for conservation policies and practices. That in turn will feed back into new types of requests of the New Zealand aid programme, whose implementation we can also encourage. Already, Australia is funding the establishment of a nature reserve of a Pacific kauri species, *Agathis macrophylla*, on Erromango island in Vanuatu.

Pacific Island local concern is there all right. For example, the furniture makers' association of Western Samoa has fought a lonely fight against log export policies, invoking the broad conservation conscience of the community in pamphlets and broadcasts which speak not only about the

servation and environmental education but is desperately short of staff, expertise and financial support for its projects and activities.

Clearly there is much which can be done to help fledgling conservation efforts in the Pacific, as well as to influence the substantial overseas aid programmes of governments like Australia, New Zealand and Japan which are heavily involved in the region. Voluntary conservation organizations in New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific are now forming a "joint campaign" grouping to pursue these goals. The support of all our members will be needed in these efforts.

### Memorable experience

New Zealanders will increasingly want to visit the beautiful Pacific forests themselves. The way into a Pacific island forest is usually through a village; and there visitors will encounter the old-fashioned values of politeness, hospitality and reciprocity, and the strong sense of respect for the individual, that make up such an important part of all the Pacific cultures. Exploring their forests with these people is one of the most memorable experiences there is.

We must remember that upholding the values and expectations of the *tangata whenua* is a vital part of such an experience. More and more young New Zealanders are exploring the Pacific; we are losing the sense of belonging wholly to Europe. Quite a good test of whether we may consider ourselves people of the Pacific is whether we can take up the challenge of involving ourselves in Pacific concerns, and do so in a manner welcomed by the island peoples themselves. 🦋