



Mt Harata rises 1374m above the Grey River Valley, and forms part of the forested wildlife corridor linking the Southern Alps with the Paparoa Range. Forests on its slopes are zoned for logging but are now proposed as an ecological reserve. This would protect the most extensive area of red beech forest on outwash gravels in North Westland, which is home to a huge range of native birds including the rare yellowhead. Photo: Kevin Smith.

Wildlife Services are working together to ensure that logging techniques are not inconsistent with a viable wildlife corridor but on questioning admits that the gorge forest is being clearfelled.

**April 27** — Butcher makes the celebrated "prize cock-up" admission in the *New Zealand Times*, and describes the logging at three points of the wildlife corridor as an "unfortunate accident." He believes the Forest Service does a good job "by and large," and that the best he can hope for regarding millers and environmentalists is that both will be "moderately unhappy."

**May 3-4** — During a visit to the Ahaura Gorge, Gerry McSweeney, Kevin Smith and

conservationists from Westport, Greymouth and Christchurch find a large forest gecko lying on top of a huge felled rimu. The gecko normally lives in the high tops of the rimu. Parakeet and kaka are abundant in virgin forest around the logging site.

**May 17** — Minister of Forests Koro Wetere is told that, although the blame for the Ahaura Gorge logging lies with the Forest Service and the Government, Forest and Bird is prepared to make a contribution of \$5000 to assist with re-location costs. The offer is conditional upon the gang being removed completely from Sale Area 628.

**May 21** — The *Dominion* informs the pub-

lic about the Society's \$5000 offer as the lobbying intensifies.

**May 22** — Gerry McSweeney appears on Radio New Zealand's *Tonight Show* and in a 10-minute interview with host Paddy O'Donnell tells a wide audience why the Society is prepared to pay \$5000 for the forest.

**May 23** — The media pressure continues with a *Morning Report* item on the subject. Meanwhile, a rimu is still being cut down every few minutes. The Forest Service argues that there is not enough timber outside Sale Area 628 to meet the mill's legal requirements.

Recently the new Director-General of Conservation said that he wished to avoid "grumbling greenies" fighting past battles. Unfortunately for Mr Piddington the battles are not over; fine environment like the Ahaura Gorge forests is still being senselessly destroyed. In Christchurch and on the West Coast there is currently a huge glut of building grade rimu selling cheaper than fast-growing radiata pine. The Coast mills are creaming off their rimu cut for high quality decorative grades and sawmill burners are flat out burning the waste.

This crisis will continue until 1990 when long-term legal commitments end to mills whose present cut is far above the sustainable production of native and exotic forests. The options are unpalatable and compromise inevitable. If the sawmill contracts were broken, astronomical compensation would have to be paid — clearly impossible for a Government already beleaguered by its deficit.

The timber must therefore be found, but only from logging damaged or lower valued forests, thus avoiding proposed re-

serves and their linking corridors. The reserves and corridors need full legal protection now, not in 1990. Unfortunately, the operative management plan for North Westland fails to protect many of these key areas repeatedly identified for protection by the Wildlife Service and the DSIR. It ignored the vast majority of public submissions which supported their protection; last minute rescue bids like Ahaura are the consequence. Even now the Ahaura forests have no legal protection. They are only temporarily safe and could again be sought for logging.

However, every crisis provides positive lessons. The Ahaura Gorge experience shows that one can save a valuable area and safeguard sawmill jobs. Timber supply and demand information now gathered by the Joint Campaign on Native Forests shows that all the proposed reserves and wildlife corridors in the North Westland can be protected yet jobs retained until exotic supply replaces natives from 1990 onwards. This information has now been shared with the West Coast United Council

who have begun meetings with conservation groups to explore common ground.

For too long both the United Council and the Government have been captive to official claims that timber supplies were inadequate to allow creation of reserves as well as meet mill commitments. Like Sir Humphrey on *Yes Minister*, such officials can always find insurmountable problems with others' ideas. Until an independent analysis is made of such claims they remain unchallenged. Fortunately, an outside analysis was made in the case of the Ahaura.

Today the deep waters of the Ahaura wind seaward, cutting their scroll shape down the 10,000-year-old glacial terrace sequence of the gorge — without the accompaniment of the Stihl chainsaws and the crash of forest giants. Instead, rafting, canoe and jet boat tours of the gorge herald a new era; the Coast's booming tourist industry, with a turnover of \$100 million a year, is poised to take over as the region's biggest revenue earner. 🐾

Gerry McSweeney, Conservation Director