

He is now developing special interest overseas tours to the Pacific Islands and Australia. These often appeal to the second and third time traveller to an area who wants to do more than skim the surface.

Today Venturereteks employs as many as 12 during the height of the season. Walter Romanes is confident that natural history tourism will continue to grow, citing as evidence the fact that the outdoors are such a part of New Zealanders' lifestyle.

Peter Dale from the New Zealand Council for Recreation and Sport sees the western world's increasing ageing population as the best proof that nature interpretation tours will grow in popularity.

Cream of the future

"These sorts of special interest tours are the cream of the future. The action holidays have had their day in the sun. As we age we will look to the more passive but still adventurous holiday," he says.

He makes the point that most of the natural history tours he has seen to date have been the work of enthusiastic amateurs, but that will change as the demand grows.

Not to be forgotten among those running natural history tours are the State Forests and National Parks and Reserves Summer Programmes and volunteer groups such as the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society.

The National Parks and Reserves Summer Programmes are now largely operating under a user-pays basis — a system initially approached with a degree of trepidation — but the success of the 1986–87 summer programme showed that people were pre-

pared to pay for a worthwhile service.

Forest and Bird and other conservation organisations have long been in the business of natural history interpretation. Every weekend, in virtually every large town in New Zealand, a guided walk is offered to a place of interest — and only for the cost of the transport. At times two and three day trips are organised with high quality guides.



For many the thrill of discovering about their own heritage is as exciting as any action-oriented holiday such as rafting or skiing. As our society ages, more passive but nevertheless adventurous tourism will increase in popularity.

Debate has been going on for several years in the Society about Forest and Bird running such tours professionally, but to date no concrete moves have been made.

Peter Dale believes the Society is in a good position to move into the field. "I could put a terrific case for Forest and Bird carrying out this work," he enthuses.

Equally, others put just as strong a case the other way, pointing out that Forest and Bird's primary job is conservation and that it shouldn't get sidetracked into other areas. The Forest and Bird executive discussed the issue at length in early 1986. They felt that there were so many pressing conservation issues in forests, coastlines and tussock lands that our hard pressed resources had to be focused on these. Nevertheless, they resolved to encourage private people to link conservation with their tourism operations.

Recently, Society West Coast field officer, Kevin Smith, ran two very popular week-long non-profit nature discovery tours in the great kahikatea forests south of Fox Glacier. These have aroused tremendous interest in promoting the South-West World Heritage concept and further tours may be organised.

Dave Bamford and Les Clark of Tourism Resource Consultants see the distinction between nature tourism and adventure tourism becoming blurred as adventure companies come to understand the importance of providing nature interpretation.

The two say that in the past interpretation has often been seen as the "icing on the cake" by land managers, but they believe that it must now be accepted as an integral part of management. 🦋

Tourism — friend or foe?

If conservationists sometimes feel they are entering an unholy alliance with the tourism industry, their reluctance to snuggle up too close can be understood in the light of statements such as this from a leading tourism industry spokesman:

"Visitors are needed by the industry and national parks, for without them neither would survive. Visitors are their *raison d'être*."

Such utilitarian thinking, that values natural areas only in relation to whether people enjoy them, is anathema to many in the conservation movement who see such areas as having intrinsic worth.

With tourism now the fourth highest foreign exchange earner and the number of overseas tourists coming to New Zealand estimated to be 900,000 by 1990, fears are being raised that tourism could replace logging as our greatest environmental threat.

Certainly it will be a courageous individual or organisation which attempts to stand in the way of any development. In times of high unemployment, the fact that one job is created by every 20 overseas arrivals speaks volumes. Tourism Minister Mike Moore has forecast that by 1990, at least 50,000 new jobs will have been created, 12,600 in the South Island's hotel construction industry alone.

For its part, the tourism industry has declared its intention to respect the environment. When the then-Commissioner for the

Environment, Ken Piddington, warned in 1985 that "tourism is the main consumer of environmental quality," his remark was met with a flurry of protest.

Replying, Tourism Council chairman John Milne said that if the word "consumer" meant that tourists looked at and admired the environment, then Mr Piddington was right.

"But if by 'consumer' he meant that tourism is destructive of the environment, then clearly he is wrong. In this sense agriculture, forestry, urbanisation and many other activities consume the natural environment far more than does tourism," Mr Milne contended.

From the vantage point of a tourist operator, Southern Heritage Tours' Mark Hanger believes there is a danger that tourism could spoil areas.

"It seems that it's almost a policy today that tourism is good. It can enhance but it can easily destroy as well.

"I hate to see the numbers game because I prefer to see quality tourism. We must ensure people come away with a greater appreciation of the environment," he says.

He criticises the inadequacy of present tourism management, pointing out that there is inadequate policing of fragile environments, with helicopter overflying all too prevalent.

Development is sometimes a double edged sword, however. For example, if it wasn't for the Remarkables skifield road his clients would not be able to reach one of the most fascinating botanical areas in Otago. The road wasn't without its critics,

and still isn't because it defaced the mountainside. Extensive tussock plantings have been made to make it more acceptable.

Dave Bamford and Les Clark, both formerly involved in training Parks and Reserves staff and today consultants in nature tourism, believe that good management should solve most problems. However, they are aware of the dangers of tourists visiting sensitive environments such as offshore islands and limestone caves.

Forest and Bird Conservation Director, Gerry McSweeney, says he came face to face with the havoc that tourism can wreck when this summer he was leading a Venturereteks party to study alpine flowers on the freeze-thaw terraces of Mt Ruapehu. They were rudely interrupted by surveyors and engineers who were planning a doubling of the massive Turoa skifield carpark — well south of the existing carpark and skifields.

"It brought home to me that nothing is sacred, and not even our National Parks are safe from the tourism juggernaut.

"Planning may accommodate more visitors, but above all we must educate people to demand less from the natural environment, to walk instead of drive or fly, use a shuttle bus instead of drive a car.

"We must also learn to cherish some of our lesser known areas rather than demand to be accommodated in our best known," he says.