

bush and sub-division were the answers to economic survival, and enhancement of the bush. Both men were conscious that with the bush "destocked" a considerable asset was being protected. At this point the Department of Lands and Survey (Department of Conservation) was contacted to assess whether the area was worth reserving and to help explore methods of funding the fencing.

Assessment of the bush revealed an exciting diverse habitat, fulfilling all the criteria that Dr Williams stated was missing from the original Goose Bay reserve. The forest in the Ote Makura rose from sea level to 960 m above sea level and although positioned in a south-easterly direction had a good mixture of sunny and shady faces with a wide range of differing aspects. The bush was relatively untouched and fell into a broad pattern of podocarp in the gullies, with red and mountain beech the dominant forest in the upper reaches. The lower Ote Makura stream reflected some of the coastal vegetation existing in the reserve system. Near the main ridge top Halls totara was evident. Along the forest fringe some areas gave way to manuka scrub, a result of past firing.

While 30 percent of the forest mirrored the coastal vegetation of mahoe and five finger the presence of matai, rimu and totara along the main riparian forest was exciting. To date only one rimu had been recorded in the reserve system south of Kaikoura. Also this forest included in it many plants that reach their southern limits, species such as *Collospermum haastatum* and *Coprosma australis*. Also noted was the fierce lancewood which is found in few local areas in Marlborough, and the special Marlborough endemic bluff plants — the Marlborough rock daisy and the New Zealand lilac. Wetter, more inaccessible areas, hosted a variety

of ferns, as well as several native herbs.

Everyone agreed Ote Makura should become a reserve. As access was available up the Ote Makura stream, Bill Dowle felt that if the area could be enjoyed without impeding his farming operation he was interested in gifting the land to the Crown.

### Fencing prohibitive

The grand plan for 24 km of fencing was estimated to cost \$149,000. This amount was prohibitive so a revision saw a five-year programme to erect 14 km of fencing at a cost of \$79,450 of which \$47,671 was Catchment Board grant and \$31,779 Mr Dowle's share.

It was agreed that half the local share would be met by the Dept of Lands and Survey on the condition that the status of the retired lands became scenic reserve.

Unfortunately in late 1986 the scheme appeared to founder. Tight economic times meant that Bill Dowle was reluctant to commit himself to a fencing programme he could ill afford. Even though the fencing would improve his operation, the cost advantages would not be readily apparent. It seemed likely Ote Makura bush would continue to be heavily grazed and damaged by stock.

Enter, at this point, retired Westland National Park Chief Ranger and Forest and Bird member Allan Cragg, a near neighbour from Goose Bay who had a keen interest in Ote Makura. He mentioned the case to Forest and Bird Head Office who suggested the Society could help with the fencing to save the bush. However fast action was needed since the Lands and Survey Department was to be disestablished on March 31 and longer term funding after then was uncertain. Therefore Forest and Bird committed itself to spend \$16,000, paid the money from its reserves and immediately

launched an appeal throughout central New Zealand. Members responded generously; to date the appeal has raised \$10,000.

Meanwhile the Marlborough Catchment Board, Lands and Survey and farmer Stuart Wood have also negotiated a comparable deal in the Omihi Stream, the next major catchment south. This proposal, funded from all parties, results in an extension of existing reserves in the Omihi catchment and along the coastal face by some 240 ha. Also a portion of the Oaro River was being protected under a covenant. This will preserve in perpetuity another major area of forest that will add considerably to a concept of a "representative reserve system."

These major forests fall within the Hundalee Ecological District, an area poorly represented in reserves. Gifts of the Ote Makura and Omihi and a willingness of farmers, local bodies, conservation groups and government departments to get together for a common cause augur well for the future. It is hoped these examples will provide an impetus for land owners and the new Department of Conservation to work together in the future.

Certainly if Bill Dowle's example is one to go by, farmers see the benefits of such a common approach.

"It's a great way of preserving the bush for the future and of sharing it with more people. I always welcomed people who wanted to come up and have a look, or go for a walk up the creek," he says. 🐦

*Mike Clare is a Conservation Department Conservation Officer based in Blenheim. He has worked as a national parks and reserves ranger for 14 years. Mike regards covenants like the above as a priority in Marlborough and has already earmarked a number of key areas for reserve — their owners willing.*

- native forests and natural areas generally should be recognised as matters of national importance under the Planning Act and protection encouraged through district schemes.
- the Rating Act should be amended so that land not being used for commercial purposes, and therefore not requiring local authority services, will not be rateable while it is not being used (rating of non-used land creates financial pressures for logging and/or clearance).
- greater financial incentives such as fencing assistance, leasing arrangements through the Conservation Department and Catchment Authorities are needed.
- the proposed Nga Whenua Rahui (land protection) scheme involving land exchange or leasing for conservation purposes on Maori land

deserves government funding.

- the Protected Natural Areas programme — identifying and protecting representative habitats and ecosystems — should be accelerated to provide guidance in setting protection priorities.

The problem that confronts us is enormous. Although there are no longer incentives to clear bush for pasture or pines, the rural downturn has seen logging and woodchipping on private land jump to unprecedented levels. Thousands of hectares are being destroyed each year. Native timber exports have increased twenty-fold in the last year.

The Society's executive views the thousands of dollars spent on bush purchase as being better spent in lobbying the Government over the above options.

We aim to do this by increasing our small staff. Private bush protection will

be the highest priority in 1987/88 for our new Northern conservation officer and staff generally. We need to put pressure on big logging companies still clearing forest; we need to liaise with the Maori community and local authorities. Ote Makura provides a good example of this.

Obviously there will be times when bush purchase is the only option, such as very important areas where all other options are unsuccessful. However, such fund raising campaigns set dangerous precedents. They can inflate the value of bush remnants and excuse the Government from taking effective action. Free marketeers will adopt the attitude that because conservationists can afford to buy bush, that is the best solution to the problem. We must resist this line of argument. There is a better way.

**Dr Gerry McSweeney**, Conservation Director