



The creation of most of New Zealand's national parks has demanded little economic sacrifice, since by far the majority have been mountainous areas. It has been estimated that only half of one percent of New Zealand's land area has been designated a national park or reserve where the land also had production potential. Mt Cook from the west. Photo: Gerard Hutching

ment of Lands and Survey, through a period of very rapid expansion, established a national parks directorate, and took various other steps to enhance departmental capability. Winston Churchill Fellowships, allowing senior departmental officers and rangers to participate in courses and study tours in the United States, played a major part in developing New Zealand expertise in national park management. During the 1970s New Zealand was exporting its skills in planning and management. Senior rangers and departmental officers, working under aid programmes, contributed to national park development in Nepal, Peru, and Western Samoa.

In the Centennial Year of National Parks in New Zealand we have fifteen superb reserves, if the Maritime Parks are included (and they are well worthy of inclusion) and if we assume the gazettal of Paparoa National Park during the year. New Zealand has an international reputation for its parks system, its management skills, and the citizen/government partnership it has invented.

Future challenge

Coincidentally, the Centennial year is also a year of major administrative change representing an enormous creative opportunity. The establishment of the Department of Conservation has the potential to carry the citizen/government partnership into new

dimensions of progress. A major challenge of the adjustment which must take place will be to ensure that the great achievement in national park and reserve development and administration, the outcome of a hundred years of historical development and effort, is carried forward within new structures.

The Centennial alone would justify profoundly creative thinking about where we are going, but the new Department, at a stage when its style, and its long term objectives are both being shaped, must make a major effort to define long term goals, and the short term objectives within the goals.

A number of the short term goals are very obvious. The Protected Natural Areas Programme represents the vital component of the future landscape. Large areas of the country have already lost their 'signature'; their visual affirmation of distinctive evolution. The P.N.A. programme has been hailed as an initiative which lies at the leading edge of applied biogeography — it must be completed without delay.

Something surely must be done about our sorry performance in the area of marine reservation. The diversity of the New Zealand coastline and its adjacent water mirrors the diversity of the land — there is a potential here for a protected system which will enhance productivity while according to the conservation, scientific and educa-

tional values of the coastline the status they must have.

Wilderness and wild rivers both represent programmes which, like protected natural areas, must be carried forward with determination, if balance is to be maintained and further losses avoided.

But to address the long term future, we need on the one hand to re-assess the very great importance of the heritage of unique nature in New Zealand, and on the other to acknowledge the inescapable link between culture and land policy. What is needed is a national inventory and valuing process, region by region, with as wide a participation as can be possibly obtained. Only through such a major effort will we be able to lift our sights and our horizons a level approaching the cultural vision which informed the gifting of Tongariro National Park by Te Heuheu Tukino and his people in 1887. 🦅

*David Thom, NPRA chairman since 1981, was a member of previous National Park Authorities and has served in national parks administrations since 1969. His book **Heritage – the parks of the people** – about the history of national parks in New Zealand, and the people and perceptions that are a part of that history, will be published in September/October.*