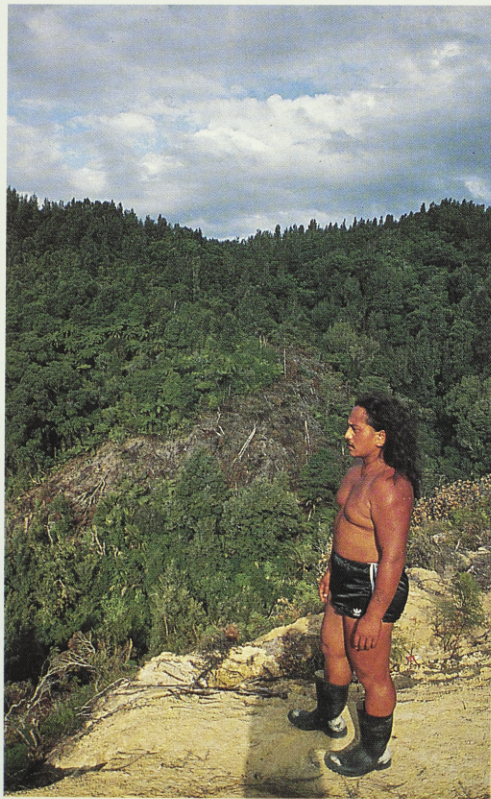


# Conservation and the Human Factor

*The following is an abridged version of this year's Sanderson Memorial Address delivered to the Society's Council meeting by Guy Salmon, Director of the Native Forest Action Council.*

In the last fifteen years, New Zealand has moved further and faster in the field of nature conservation — especially forest conservation — than any other Western country. The intensity and energy of the conservation movement, the broad following it commands, and above all, the relative lack of serious popular opposition, compared to other countries, have been key factors. In the 1970s, conservationists ceased to be a minority tradition, and became the mainstream. I first became convinced of this when gathering signatures for the Maoria Declaration petition in 1976. Nine out of every ten people we approached would sign. With 341,160 signatures it became the biggest petition in New Zealand's history to that time. The huge wave of public support for our rather radical tree top protest at Purora in 1978 was another sign that the times had changed. The decision of the Muldoon Government to set aside permanently the huge tracts of Okarito and Waikukupa forests in 1981 was an important confirmation. And much has been achieved since under the present Government.

The sense of having become a conservationist majority raised questions about our relationship to the new minorities — the forestry and timber workers, the associated towns and regions dependent on native timber milling, the users of native timber, and the owners of private forest including the Maori people.



Tame Iti, a leader of Nga Tamariki O Te Kohu, stands on the native forested mountain Taiaharua which his group successfully defended from clearance last year. A renaissance of Maori conservation traditions is now occurring. Photo: Shane Wright



Aorangi Mountain: The Department of Conservation has begun discussions with the Maori owners to find a way of protecting fine podocarp forest on the slopes of this sacred mountain near Taihape. This could be the beginning of a major, properly funded programme to promote forest protection on Maori land. Photo: Graeme Loh

## Deep Ecology

These questions arose at the same time as the growth within the conservation movement of a 'deep ecology' consciousness. Deep ecology calls for a radically new aesthetic, ethical and metaphysical grasp of the human relationship to nature. Drawing on the Western Romantic tradition, the Tao and Zen traditions of the East, tribal cultures like the American Indians, and philosophers such as Spinoza and Whitehead, thinkers of the deep ecology school have sought a renewed reverence for things natural, and a more humble place for humans in the natural world. This also means new personal lifestyles. Dismissed as "shallow ecology" is the idea that the earth exists for the benefit of humans or even for our so-called 'responsible stewardship' through management and engineering.

I believe there is much in deep ecology thinking that is exciting and valuable and there is no doubt it will become far more dominant in Western conservation thinking in the future. But it needs to be integrated with a wider philosophy about what it means to be human. In its more simplified political manifestations, deep ecology presents certain dangers. The characterising of

humans as 'just another species' with no special right to rule the rest of creation can lead to an inadequate response to the human factor which is central to the resolution of almost every conservation issue. The deep ecology slogan of 'no compromise in defence of mother earth' is a formula that would deny the conservation movement any meaningful dialogue with the people affected by our campaigning.

There have been strong arguments within the conservation movement on these issues for some years. But these arguments have not been publicly visible, at least until the recent signing of the West Coast Accord led to the setting up of the Beech Action Committee, admittedly a very small group. The unity we have in New Zealand is a different situation from that in some other Pacific rim countries where splits have weakened the conservation movement, and deep ecology activists have polarized elements of the popular culture into strong opposition to environmentalism, setting the cause back a long way.

The mainstream conservation movement in New Zealand has consistently integrated human concerns into its advocacy. Ways to maintain employment or create alternative employment have always been to the fore in our forest protection proposals and, inadequately at first but more consistently in recent years, there has been direct dialogue and involvement with people affected by



The free operation of market forces resulted in this woodchip logging above Marlborough's picturesque Pelorus River. This block was bought by a Timaru businessman who stripped off the forest and pocketed the proceeds before abandoning the land.

Photo: Guy Salmon