



One of the finest scenic roads in New Zealand runs through the tussock-covered hills of the Lindis Pass in Central Otago; here also occur relic and regenerating stands of Hall's totara, reminders of the forested history of the eastern South Island before natural and man-induced firing altered the landscape. Extremely valuable from a scientific and scenic point of view, these dry country forests are gradually disappearing from the high country. One of the reasons is that people still set fire to them, accidentally or otherwise. The Waitaki Catchment Commission recently took the uncommon step of prosecuting three pastoral lessees on charges of burning outside a permitted area. One of these – Timothy Innes of Dunstan Downs, on whose lease the pictured Hall's totara are found – pleaded that he took all reasonable care and precautions to prevent fire from his permit area spreading into the native forest nearby. The charge against him was dismissed, but one of the other lessees was convicted and fined \$250 for burning an area without a permit. This is the second time in 12 years that the mountain totara on Dunstan Downs Station have been burned.

The Conservation Department is now the rural fire authority over much of New Zealand. They are working closely with Catchment Authorities to ensure fire permits issued for the South Island high country in future avoid damaging natural areas like the Lindis Pass Hall's totara.

A pamphlet on bush fires just produced by DoC shows that each year an average of 780 accidental wild fires burn out an area equivalent to the size of Abel Tasman National Park. Significantly land clearers (farmers, foresters) burn more than 5 times (87 percent) more vegetation accidentally than picnickers, hunters and vehicle drivers combined!

A common but beautiful sea slug which protects itself through its colouration, warning would-be predators that is poisonous to eat. Many other species and marine habitats require a different form of protection: the establishment of a network of marine protected areas around the coast, an argument presented on page 2 of this issue. Photo: Ken Grange