



## Survey Long Overdue

From the time of writing our submissions in 1985, the chaos of environmental restructuring intervened. It took us nearly two years to return and organise a botanical survey to explore the 8,000 hectares adjoining the Cox-Binser area to find out what special or distinctive plants, animals and land forms were there. In the interim the National Parks Authority recommended the Cox-Binser addition. This was approved by Government in 1986 and only awaits survey to be added to the national park.

Finally, in December 1987, Society president Alan Mark and I went into the Cox-Candlestick region with Arthur's Pass National Park ranger Mike Harding and Canterbury branch committee member and DoC staffer Amanda Baird.

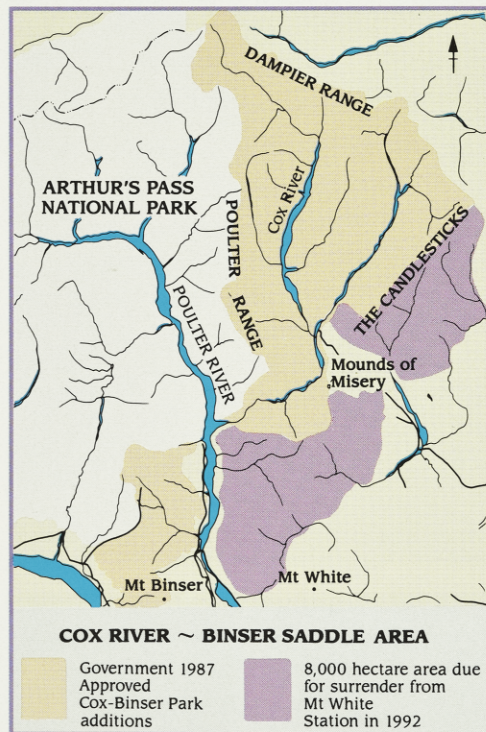
For a week we clambered up to 1800m altitude over most of the ridges and valleys within the area and measured more than 50 vegetation plots. Subsequently we also surveyed Mt Binser and parts of the Cox Valley ranges to see how different this vegetation was from the 8,000 hectares on the Mt White Station.

The survey of the 8,000 hectares showed substantial vegetation differences from the existing national park and its Cox-Binser addition. The surveyed area lies largely within the Cass ecological district which is outside the Park boundaries. The Cass district has a much drier climate than the national park. It includes the arid Cass-Castle Hill intermontane basins. Short tussock, dry shrublands, pockets of mountain beech forest and distinctive scree vegetation are a feature of the district.

\* Footnote: In 1985 Forest and Bird sparked off a major controversy over the Mt White run plan. Initially the Catchment Board had proposed to destock the 12,361 hectares of the lease but not require its surrender from the lease, hence contravening the 1984 Labour party election policy which argued that when taxpayer money was used to retire mountainland from grazing, that land should revert from leasehold tenure to full Crown control and be available for recreation use. After much public debate, Works Minister Fraser Colman finally consented to an amended run plan involving surrender of much (8119 ha) of the retired land. This decision was a trendsetter and soon after the Government announced its 1985 Destocking and Surrender policy for the South Island High Country. This requires the identification and surrender of severely eroded land from pastoral leases. Unfortunately this important policy has not yet been activated by officials charged with lease administration.

In exchange for losing the grazing over a quarter of their lease, the Mt White Station owners receive a government subsidy of \$209,700 towards an 8-year retirement plan costing \$305,150. The plan involves retirement fences, windbreaks and cultivation, oversowing and topdressing of the lower parts of the station which will allow it to carry on a smaller area an equivalent or greater number of stock to those previously run over the whole property.

Left: The yellow flowering *Leptinella dendyi* (pictured) and its relative the black flowered *L. atrata* are distinctive scree plants of the eastern high country as is the massive vegetable sheep *Raoulia eximia* (centre) and the succulent penwiper plant (right). All these plants are predominantly found east of the present National Park boundary. Photos Mike Harding and Alan Mark.



These features were all well represented within the 8,000 hectare survey area on Mt White Station and would add significantly to ecological representation in the Park. However, we also found a number of rare plants and plants at their limits of distribution.

Major changes occur in snow tussock distribution. The predominantly Nelson-Marlborough carpet snowgrass *Chionochloa australis* reaches its southern limit here on Gray Hill and east to the Puketeraki range. Within the study area it is competing with other snow tussock grasslands along a classic invasion front.

- There is a major transition in alpine scree and herbfield plants. A succulent scree willowherb (*Epilobium crassum*) and Haast's buttercup are found within the survey block but no further west in the existing or expanded National Park (Burrows 1986).
- The Nelson-Marlborough tree daisy *Traversia baccharoides*, abundant in shrub communities in the block, is also

at its southern geographic limit here and east to the Okuku Pass.

- There are extensive populations of the endangered whipcord *Hebe armstrongii*.
- Mistletoe is unusually abundant on the mountain beech forests of the survey area.

## Plans For An Enlarged Park

Under the run retirement plan, the 8,000 hectare Candlestick-Gray Hill area will become stewardship land within DoC in 1992.

There is a strong case for this area to be considered as a park addition. It meets park criteria for ecological representativeness, distinctive and special features. It has a scenic grandeur characteristic of the dry intermontane basins. The area also provides semi-wilderness opportunities for trampers without the severe climate further west. Remote from the main road and rail that dominates so much of the park, the Cox-Candlestick needs no new tracks or huts. Wide bush-edged river valleys are both the accessways and the camping sites.

Addition to the national park should also allay the fears of high country lessees like Mt White manager Ray Marshall that surrendered lands will no longer have a caretaker. Control to prevent spread of the small pockets of gorse and broom within the block will be of highest priority should the area come into the national park. Public use of the area will also be supervised and managed by park staff. Visitors would be encouraged to observe the usual high country courtesies in notifying Mr Marshall were they visiting the area.

Arthur's Pass National Park may well be a trendsetter in a programme of ecologically-based park additions which will have a powerful impact in our next century of national parks. 🦜

## Acknowledgements:

All of us on the Forest and Bird survey sincerely appreciate the kind co-operation of Chief Ranger Peter Simpson, the staff of Arthur's Pass National Park, Mr Ray Marshall Manager of Mt White Station and Dr Colin Burrows, Canterbury University.

## References:

Burrows, C J 1986. Botany of Arthur's Pass National Park, South Island NZ. *History of botanical studies and checklist of the vascular flora*. *NZ Journal of Botany* 24:9-68  
Lands and Survey 1985. Cox River-Binser Saddle Area-resource study.  
North Canterbury Catchment Board 1985. *Mt White Station Soil and Water Conservation Plan*.