

allow people to do things which may be damaging to the environment. So you don't see football grounds or supermarkets in the middle of them. Mining or logging are not appropriate activities in national parks. In some New Zealand parks we allow cattle grazing, although this damages the environment too. Even tourism can be a problem if not properly controlled. In Wilderness Areas there are rules against building tracks and huts, or even allowing aeroplanes flying overhead, so that people who go into these remote areas can enjoy them with as few modern comforts as possible.

### How much of New Zealand is in Parks?

2.5 million hectares, or 9 percent of New Zealand's land area is in national parks. The Conservation Department, which administers parks, has direct responsibility for about 30 percent of New Zealand's land surface.

### Problems facing Parks

National Parks don't always remain parks forever. If a government wanted to, it could pass a law revoking national park status for an area, although it would be a very unpopular move.

Lack of funding is a problem. In 1987 the Department of Conservation spent about \$10 million looking after national parks and reserves. For comparison the Government is proposing to buy four Navy frigates, at a cost of at least \$300 million each!

Introduced plants and animals threaten many of our pristine natural areas. For example, wild pine trees have been discovered growing up the flanks of Mt Ruapehu, and the plant Old Man's Beard has destroyed many small reserves by strangling trees. Deer, possums, thar (a Himalayan mountain goat), goats, wallabies are well known for their ability to eat out certain native plants. Rats, ferrets and stoats prey on our defenceless native animals, especially flightless birds such as the takahe, kakapo and black stilt.

Some of our parks have been described as "fun parlours" because more time is spent on catering for people, eg. skiing, than looking after the natural values. Some developers promote such projects as gondolas which might damage the environment and spoil other people's enjoyment of the national park. Most people do not like to see mechanical contrivances in national parks and want them to remain in a wilderness state as much as possible.

### Why we need more Parks

Most of our national parks are in mountain-



*Opening of Whanganui National Park, 1986. Photo: Gerry McSweeney*

ous regions such as Mt Cook and were never wanted for farming or forestry. However, the great lowland forests that used to cover much of the country are now largely gone, and it is important that those remaining are included in national parks. That is because they are biologically very rich and many plants and animals live in them. A good example is South Westland, where the last vestiges of our once huge kahikatea estate remain. Threatened birds such as kaka are found in relatively plentiful numbers in these forests.

Our national park system should be enlarged, to include representative areas of many wetlands, the vast tussocklands of the eastern South Island and marine areas throughout New Zealand. You will also find that most of our national parks are a long

way from our major cities; therefore we need to create more reserves close to cities so people don't have to travel too far to enjoy the outdoors. ⚡

#### National Parks

1. Tongariro (1887, 79,000 ha)
2. Egmont (1900, 33,500 ha)
3. Urewera (1954, 213,000 ha)
4. Whanganui (1986, 79,000 ha)
5. Abel Tasman (1942, 22,500 ha)
6. Nelson Lakes (1956, 102,000 ha)
7. Paparoa (1987, 30,000 ha)
8. Arthur's Pass (1929, 94,497 ha)
9. Westland (1960, 117,550 ha)
10. Mt Cook (1953, 70,000 ha)
11. Mt Aspiring (1964, 287,000 ha)
12. Fiordland (1905, 1.2 million ha)