



THE RED HILLS :

Miners have always dreamed of possible fortunes to be made from the fabled Red Hills, though the fortunes are no more tangible than the dreams. Mike Harding here describes some more lasting values found in the Red Hills than minerals.



In West Otago, south of Haast, further than roads have been pushed, is a place called the Red Hills: a mysterious sounding place that many people talk about but where few have been; a place where the mountains are in fact red, and devoid of vegetation; a place where miners and prospectors have delved and dreamed of indescribable wealth; and a place so remote, so rugged and so battered by cold, wet westerly storms that successful trips to it are legendary.

Gradually, I accumulated information: an account of A.J. Barrington's epic journey in 1864; tramping club trip reports; DSIR botanical surveys; and a resources report produced in the last year of the Lands and

Survey Department's existence, as part of the long-running debate over the future of the area. But, perhaps not surprisingly, general information on the plants and animals, access, routes and travelling times was lacking.

The Red Hills became even more fascinating. Here was a place that seemed to be largely undiscovered or unexplored. My thoughts turned into a personal challenge: to tramp through this country and discover for myself the mysteries of this bizarre, barren landscape. It would be a journey of several days' duration through broken mountain ranges, untracked forest and involve crossing large, swift rivers. There would be no facilities: no tracks or even described routes.