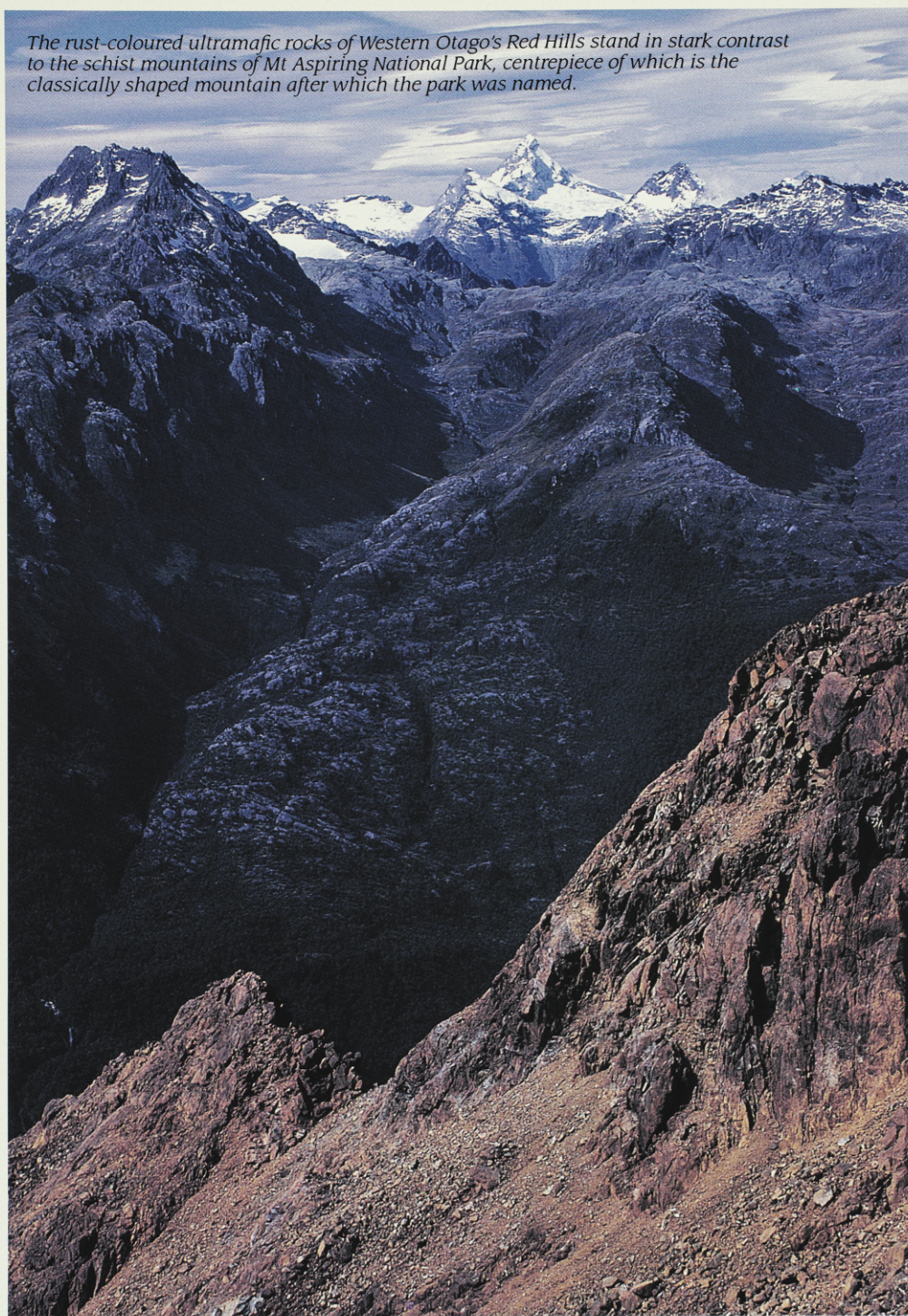
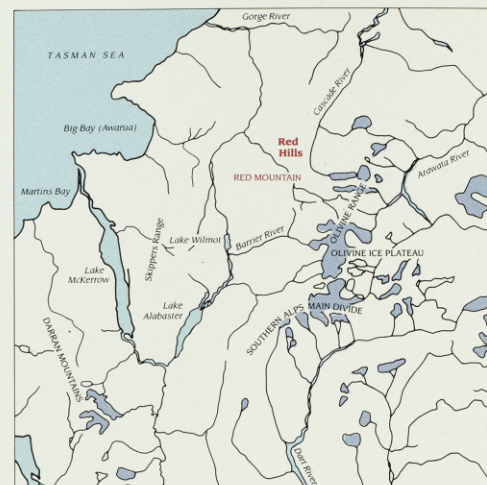


The rust-coloured ultramafic rocks of Western Otago's Red Hills stand in stark contrast to the schist mountains of Mt Aspiring National Park, centrepiece of which is the classically shaped mountain after which the park was named.



and disillusioned, from the lower Cascade, after months of fruitless prospecting from their starting point in Queenstown. Separated crossing Red Mountain and trapped by early winter snows, they were lucky to survive and reach the relative comfort of their base camp at Lake Alabaster. Then this wilderness took weeks to cross, not days, and help was too far away to be useful.



As we descended to the Pyke River and the broad sweep of Big Bay, I thought of the naturalist Dick Jackson, lost here last summer, and what the solitude of that last camp would have meant to one so fascinated by nature and its mysteries. And together we wondered as we scrambled over the bouldery beaches on the long days back up the coast how the bulldozer driver felt when he scarred this pristine beach with his machine a few years ago. Nature would mostly recover from this temporary intrusion, the Tasman Sea battering the sculpted rocks on the one side and windswept forest carpeting the flank of the Malcolm Range on the other.

And I still wonder, as I reflect from the tracked and travelled mountains of Arthur's Pass, what the future of the Red Hills will be. Will others after us have the opportunity to experience the power and grandeur of nature free from the trappings of modern society? Will others have the opportunity to experience the challenge that is provided only by those very few areas that remain as wilderness?

The future of the Red Hills as wilderness is in our hands. The challenge is ours to counter the arguments for mining, logging, roading or other tourist development. For myself, I may never return there, but it will always be important to me that it is there as wilderness, just as it is to many others who may never travel there. It is important that there are places where ecological processes continue free from the direct influence of humans, and it is important to future generations that there are still places like the Red Hills when it is their turn to live on this beautiful planet.

We cannot recreate wilderness, so let us be sure to save what we have.

*The National Parks and Reserves Authority has recommended that the Red Hills be added to Mt Aspiring National Park. The Minister of Conservation, Helen Clark, must now decide whether to formally accept that recommendation.*

*Mike Harding is a ranger at Arthur's Pass National Park.*

Finally, in April our small party of three, laden with 12 day's food, ventured up the Cascade Valley. Filled with a mixture of excitement and apprehension, and with only a map and compass to guide us, we picked our way through the fertile lowland forest of the Cascade. We forded the deep, cold river when forced to and gradually gained the upper valley. Only faint traces of a 100-year-old prospecting track reminded us that people had come before us.

Watching the weather carefully, we gained the open tussock tops of the northern Red Hills Range. To the east the gnarled beech timberline of the Cascade straggled against the basins and plateaux of the range, and to the west a band of weather-beaten subalpine shrubs clung to the abrupt scarp of the Alpine Fault. The ochre glow of the Red Mountain massif tempted us onward south along the range.

An overwhelming feeling of solitude overcame us, at the same time as one of freedom – to wander at will across this striking landscape, with no tracks or footprints to distract us from our selected route.



*The Red Hills . . . a landscape virtually devoid of vegetation. This *Dracophyllum uniflorum* struggles to survive on the iron and magnesium-rich rocks of the region.*

By moonlight we gazed from the shattered rock across valleys and ranges, east to Mt Aspiring baring a flank seen only by those who journey this far; and closer the sheer ramparts of the Barrier Range and Olivine Ice Plateau, glaciated peaks unknown and unnamed, resisting the invasion of civilisation.

My thoughts turned to Barrington and his companions retreating tired, cold, hungry