



Where winter snow insulates the ground from extremes of temperature, hardy snow tussocks (*Chionochloa macra*) and mountain daisies (*Celmisia viscosa*) endure. Photo: Mike Harding. Right: Trampers traverse the broken ridge to the Gap. Only an hour's drive from Christchurch, the Torlesse Range is a popular weekend destination. Photo: Mike Harding

used by the first runholders to open the country for sheep grazing. Stock once roamed high over the open tops of the range and were mustered down to the lower country before the winter snows. Nowadays the upper country has been destocked, either voluntarily, or as part of soil and water conservation plans. Where stock pressure has been reduced and burning has ceased the rich *Dracophyllum acerosum* shrubland has regenerated and forest may eventually return.

On drier sites manuka or kanuka dominates and on the wetter terraces and higher slopes a tall tussock grassland remains. Above this, and in the scree-filled gullies, the open rock will remain in its natural sparsely vegetated state. Remnants of the original mountain beech forest still cover the steeper and less accessible northern and eastern parts of the range, and are now vested with the Department of Conservation as stewardship areas. Apart from the forested areas the entire

range, including its alpine tops, is held in pastoral lease or pastoral occupation licence tenure. The range and its major summits of Castle Hill Peak, Mt Torlesse and Otarama separate the Castle Hill run to the north-west from Brooksdale in the south-west. The smaller Avoca run occupies the north-eastern part of the range and the freehold Mt Torlesse station covers the foothills to the south-east. The pastoral run tenure allows the grazing of sheep and cattle while retaining the land in