



Lesser knots are among the wading birds that congregate in large flocks on Fairwell Spit each summer feeding on crustaceans, small molluscs, worms and insects. In the autumn they leave for the return journey to their breeding grounds in the Arctic.

belt of quartz-rich sandstone and siltstone. These strata form the breathtaking Anatoki Peaks and Dragons Teeth on the Douglas Range. On their broad northern slopes red tussock on poorly-drained soils alternates with mid-ribbed snow grass on better-drained soils. Both are studded with *Astelia* and *Aciphylla*.

Further east, the rocks are extremely diverse with some that shatter to produce mobile rocky screes, while dark grey volcanics or pale crystalline limestone protrude stubbornly from ridges. This zone harbours almost the full botanical splendour of north-west Nelson. Plants endemic to the region include the large *Astelia skottsbergii* and the tiny *Gentiana filipes*, with its intricate rosettes and minute seeds that sail on the wind to seek the tiniest patch of limestone. The conglomerate rocks in areas such as the slopes behind Lake Peel above the Cobb Reservoir are packed together like a super-hard, colourful, concrete. It breaks into heaps of angular blocks, providing stable landscapes for shrubs such as *Hebe cockayneana* and *Brachylottis adamsii* to colonise.

Many rocks here are rich in iron, so they weather to reddish colours visible even from the top of the Takaka Hill, 22 km away. Extremely iron- and magnesium-rich soils develop on rocks from serpentine and asbestos such as those in the Cobb and Takaka valleys. A small group of scrubby plants are quite at home in the hostile chemical environment these rocks produce as well as a species of red tussock, and several small herbs that are found virtually nowhere else but on these soils.

The most-eastern of these rock groups is the sedimentary belt of rocks that forms the skyline peaks of the Arthur Range.

These lime-rich ancient rocks dissolve in the acid groundwater rather than crumble, and so there are numerous holes in the landscape. The deepest of them lead to some of the world's most spectacular cave systems under Mt Arthur and Mt Owen. The shallow holes and trenches provide wonderful places for plants to grow, especially as deer and goats cannot reach them. They are well drained, fertile and sheltered, like giant inverted planter boxes. Their walls are studded with glossy-leaved buttercups and senecios, and even sensitive ferns that perhaps survive because the constant down-draughts of cool air protect them from frosts. The tussock lands have been reduced in quality and extent by past grazing but plant diversity is very high with profusely flowering willow herbs and many other alpine plants abundant on the limestone screes.

Further to the south-west, almost to the Buller, are rocks and landscapes of an entirely different nature. The Garibaldi Ridge above the Karamea and the Matiri Tops are plateaux of young Tertiary rocks that avoided the worst of the glaciations. Nowhere else in New Zealand are such landscapes to be found above the tree line. These limestone plateaux look down on debris-filled valleys and lakes dammed by earthquakes. These are very special places. The plateaux are covered in red tussockland and more broad-leaved snow grass than grows in most of the rest of north-west Nelson. About 500 plant species are found here, amounting to about half the total flora of the region, and between 20 to 25 percent of the total New Zealand flora.

From the ramparts of Garibaldi Ridge, we can see further ranges to the north. Smoke curls up as a leatherwood fire quickly boils the billy. Evening brings the

## National Park investigation underway

THE CREATION of a new national park is a rare event and few opportunities remain in New Zealand for new parks. The north-west corner of the South Island contains an expansive tract of natural land that richly deserves national park status. The momentum for a national park here has been building for some time, at least as far back as the campaigns in the 1970s to stop foolish proposals for a Heaphy Road and to end the destructive logging of bird-rich forests in the Oparara basin north of Karamea.

West Coast and Nelson conservationists kept the idea alive and have now convinced key politicians and the national conservation establishment that the time is right for a new national park.

Mining interests and some die-hard anti-park developers on the West Coast will oppose the park but their objections can be swept aside by nationwide support for the national park. The views of the developing nature tourism industry in places like Karamea will also be important.

The New Zealand Conservation Authority has begun the formal process of investigating a new national park. A report on the proposal is being prepared by the Department of Conservation (DoC) and will probably be released for public comment in July this year. The area under investigation only includes land currently administered by DoC.

Every national park that has been created in New Zealand had overwhelming public support, so please write a simple letter stating your views on the proposal when submissions are called for. Your letter will help create conservation history.

Forest and Bird's *Conservation News* will keep you posted.

Kevin Smith

native mountain trout, or koaro, from beneath the tussock-studded tarn banks. Cold air settles now, drawing sun-stored warmth from the rocks while the moon throws glistening light across the stilled waters. Time now to lie beneath the stars and wonder about this vast region that has something of everything and much more of what our spirits need. ♦

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