

financial. If this forest can be used to provide income for her she will be happy. If this means cutting it down then so be it.

AT FIRST GLANCE it would seem that timber extraction is the only way of bringing development to this forested landscape. But there are alternatives.

Not all industries use landscape resources in destructive ways and, in fact, some are close allies of conservation.

Tourism is Fiji's biggest industry. However, Fiji's tourist industry is currently having problems with falling visitor numbers and, of course, falling profits and Government revenues. The industry itself is calling out for a diversification in visitor attractions in order to build a firmer base to maintain tourist flows. For the last 20 years Fiji has sold itself as a realm of white sand, blue sea and lazy, leaning palm trees. But Fiji has much more to offer. It has rainforests, unique wildlife and dramatic landforms that lie there awaiting appreciation.

Not only are these landscapes spectacular, they are also safe. There are none of the "unpleasant" features shared by the most of the other rainforests of the world. Fiji has no crocodiles, leeches, malaria or other dangerous animals.

As Fiji's tourist industry begins to realise the potential of having the world's most accessible tropical forests, development in these areas will begin to take on a new meaning.

Natural environments are common tourist attractions in many other countries, a fact demonstrated by the number of international travellers wishing to see what is left of wild and natural places. The use of New Zealand's national parks by the tourism industry here is a good example. North Queensland tempts its visitors with a tropical forest paradise and people are flocking there. Costa Rica widely advertises an experience in its rainforests, while Kenya puts the Serengeti National Park at the forefront of its tourist promotion.

Within the context of Fiji's potential as a nature tourism destination the development options for places like Wabu Creek suddenly broaden.

There is, however, a distinct economic contrast between nature tourism and large scale logging, and here was a crucial missing link in the conservation equation at Wabu. The short-term financial gains likely from a tourist operation in the Wabu Creek forest cannot compete with the short-term gains that large scale logging can offer. Income generated from tourism is likely to comprise smaller amounts than logging but spread over a



A strangler fig embraces a tarawau tree in its quest to capture a space in the canopy of the Wabu Creek forest.

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