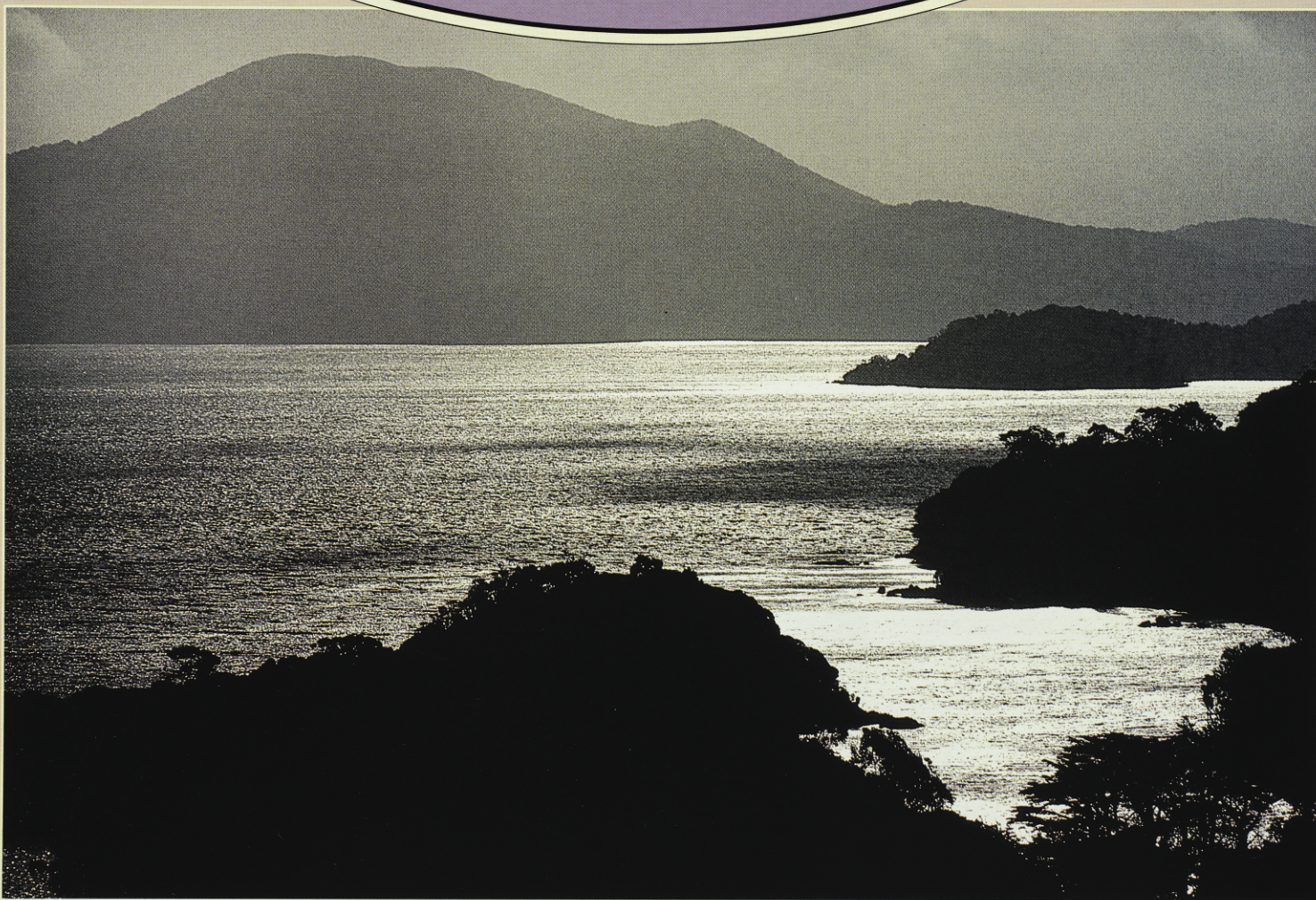


# Paterson Inlet

A N A T I O N A L T R E A S U R E

*Stewart Island's Paterson Inlet is one of the jewels of New Zealand's marine world. SUE MATURIN takes us to Stewart Island to look at the natural features of the inlet and to find out what's happening about protecting it.*



ROBIN THOMAS/DOC

*Looking across Paterson Inlet to Pryse Peak.*

**T**EN OF US were tightly buckled into our seats, ready for the half hour flight across some of New Zealand's roughest waters to Stewart Island. In front of me sat two people with briefcases, and I guessed from their conversation they were fisheries officials and would be heading to the same place I was – a public meeting to discuss options for protecting Paterson Inlet.

We caught tantalising glimpses of the inlet, a drowned river valley stretching 16 km inland from its a narrow island-cluttered entrance to the broad mudflats

of the Freshwater and Rakeahua Rivers. Unbroken forest down to the water's edge surrounded most of the inlet's convoluted bays and long arms. As we got out of the plane a flock of kakariki flew up and we could hear the chuckling of kaka.

This is what much of New Zealand must have been like when Maori first arrived – a huge expanse of forest and the air filled with bird song.

It is the forest still covering the catchment of Paterson Inlet that makes the inlet one of the least spoilt harbours in New Zealand, and one of the country's marine treasures.

The topsoil has stayed on the land and hasn't been washed into the inlet to smother marine life, and sunlight can penetrate further into the depths, unhindered by sediment-laden water. There are no agricultural chemicals here and no superphosphate nor industrial discharges. Salmon farms in one of the large bays are the only intrusion where wastes from the cages are covering the marine life beneath.

Apart from these farms, the main disturbances to marine life in the inlet come from recreational fishers, divers and a small number of commercial fishers.

Stewart Island is renowned for its