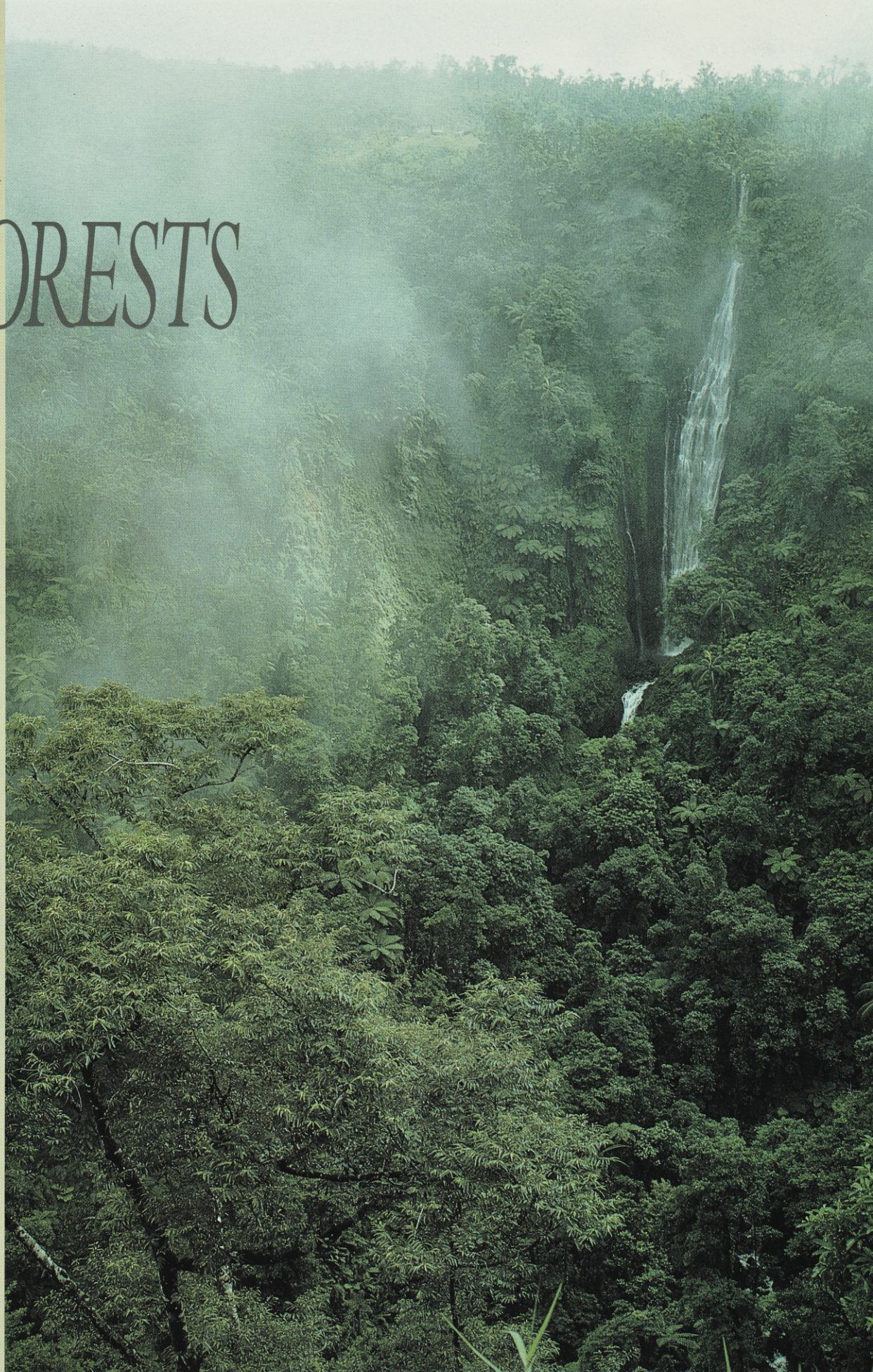


Trading in RAINFORESTS

The Rio Earth Summit in June saw governments dodging the issue of global deforestation. Developed countries suggested re-greening the earth with planted forests as an easy option, while governments of tropical timber producing countries claimed it as their sovereign right to exploit their forests as they wish. GRANT ROSOMAN examines New Zealand's role in the rainforest timber trade.

Rainforest on Upolu, Western Samoa. Tropical rainforests are the most complex living structures on the earth. A mere ten hectares of rainforest in Sarawak, for example, may support 700 tree species – more than the total of tree and shrub species found in New Zealand.



ROD HAY

TRADING in rainforest timbers probably started in Mesopotamia over 4,000 years ago, with timbers shipped from India. Now in the late 20th century, the exploitation and destruction continues. Wood is today the world's most widely traded wild product.

Whether it be the temperate rainforests

of Canada, Chile or New Zealand, or the tropical forests of Sarawak, Fiji or Ghana, current logging practices are mining rather than sustaining the resource.

This is particularly so in tropical rainforests where the complex and diverse plant and animal relationships within the forests cannot withstand present commercial logging practices. Logging has been a major contributor to the virtual exhaus-

tion of forests in Thailand, the Philippines, West Africa and Central America over the last 30 years, with Burma, Malaysia and parts of Indonesia following close behind.

In the year to June 1991, New Zealand imported 13,408 cubic metres of tropical timber worth \$22 million. Ninety percent comes from South-east Asia and the Pacific, where commercial logging is