

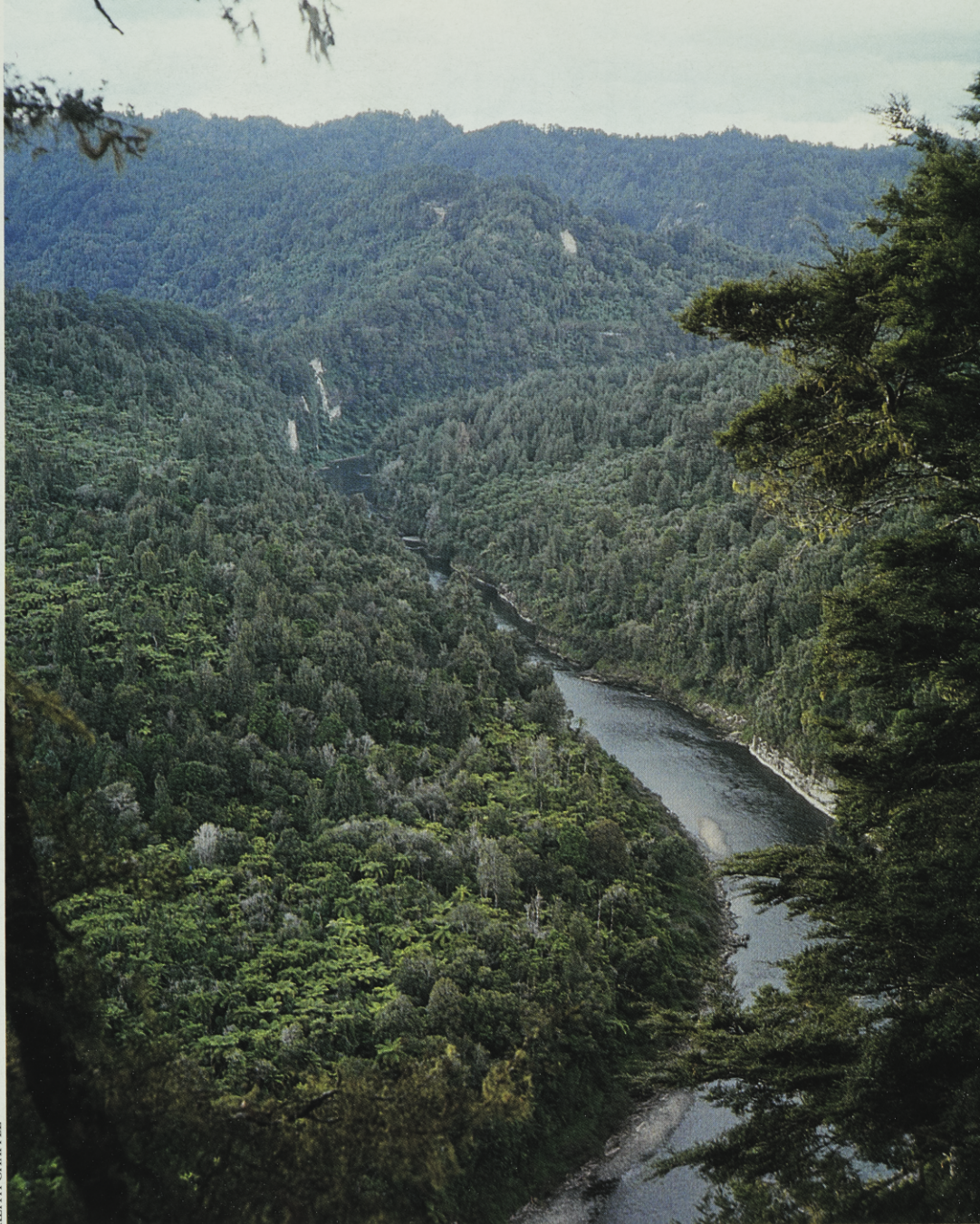
Power Development had leaked out and Peter McIntyre, artist and fisherman, penned an eloquent plea to *The Evening Post*. "The Philistine with his bulldozer is on the rampage in New Zealand," he wrote.

Even in 1964, in an era when development was largely unquestioned and environmental impact assessment unheard of, the arrogance and greed of the Electricity Department in taking nearly all the water from these rivers aroused opposition and a sense of great unfairness.

**F**OR KEITH CHAPPLE, chairperson and driving force of the coalition (see *Forest & Bird* November 1990), it has been a long struggle. For much of 1989 and 1990 he had to take leave from his job at Taumarunui District Hospital to attend the mammoth Planning Tribunal hearing in Wellington.

As the rain pours down on the roof of the hall in Owhango, Chapple gives a brief summary of the campaign. He notes that the meeting to set up the coalition five years earlier was held in the same hall, "even the chairs and tables arranged the same way".

In 1987 the level of the minimum flow of the Whanganui, set four years previously, was soon to come up for renewal. The Wanganui River Flows Coalition – 35 groups including such unlikely environmentalists as the King Country Federated Farmers, the local Young Nationals and the Wanganui Chamber of Commerce – came together to argue that the water should be shared. "The coalition at no stage argued that the Tongariro Power Development, or indeed any part of it, should be scrapped," Chapple explains. "But 1987 was the celebration of the centenary of Tongariro National Park, our first national park, and yet just across the road, all the rivers coming out of the park disappeared into



KEITH CHAPPLE

*The Whanganui River in the Whanganui National Park. The loss of its headwaters has damaged the river and the life that depends on it along its whole length.*

frigging holes in the ground!"

The struggle to cut back Electricorp's share of the water took the coalition through two major tribunal hearings and to the High Court.

Tom Wells takes the floor. For the

former college headmaster and one of Chapple's chief aides and strategists, it was a great victory for the local community. "The whole campaign was an immense learning experience," he says. "It is one of the very special delights and privileges of life to work with kindred spirits on an issue that really matters. And this one did." He pays tribute to Chapple who was "inspiring to work alongside and to see at work".



IAN CLOSE

*Some of the key players in the campaign to restore water to the mountain rivers. Standing on Owhango bridge: Larry Rogers, Tom Wells, Bron Hunt (DoC), Tich Todd, Keith Chapple, Ken Hunt (DoC), Brenda Chapple and John Ombler (DoC).*

**T**HE COALITION, of course, didn't do all the work by themselves. In 1988 when it looked as though Electricorp was going to stretch the dispute out for as long as they could and test the resources of the conservation groups, the coalition had thrown down the challenge to the recently formed Department of Conservation. The department was asked to take up the cause of the rivers and its wildlife and join the coalition and the local Maori trust board